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The turtle lady

by [Cele Seldon](#) and [Lynn Seldon](#) June 1, 2021



Mary Alice Monroe, queen of the beach novel and fierce turtle protector, draws inspiration for her life and work from living on the South Carolina coast.

Photo by Mic Smith

Mary Alice Monroe

HOME TURF: Isle of Palms.

CLAIMS TO FAME: Passionate sea turtle conservationist; *New York Times*-bestselling author of 27 books and counting (maryalicemonroe.com).

LITTLE-KNOWN FACT: Monroe discovered a turtle nest on her 51st birthday, and with truth being stranger than fiction, there were exactly 51 eggs in the nest.

WHAT'S NEXT?: Monroe is beginning research on a new novel set in South Carolina. "It's a full immersion into a South Carolina landscape different from my recent seaside settings."

FAMILY MATTERS: Monroe's daughter, Gretta Kruesi (a Clemson grad), is a muralist whose work, including paintings with sea turtles, adorns public facilities on Isle of Palms.

Mary Alice Monroe's sea-blue eyes sparkle when she talks turtles—or passionately writes about them. After all, this self-proclaimed "Turtle Lady" found her true calling in environmental fiction when she moved with her family to the Isle of Palms in 1999.

"When we moved to the Isle of Palms for my husband's career, I was in my forties, raising three children, and working hard as an established writer," Monroe recalls. "Little did I know that our move ... would change not only my life, but my career."

Monroe joined a volunteer team certified by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources to safeguard loggerhead turtle nests, and the experience inspired her first *New York Times*-bestselling novel, *The Beach House*, which was made into a Hallmark Hall of Fame movie starring Andie MacDowell (a Gaffney native).

"The first thing I did was become a volunteer for the Island Turtle Team," Monroe recalls. "I knew nothing about turtles. My sister, who lived in Florida, told me about watching a mother turtle laying her eggs, and how tears flowed from her eyes as she nested." After seeing a mother laying more than 100 eggs and the "tears" (actually a natural cleansing mechanism), Monroe knew she had a theme for her fiction.

Her newest novel, *The Summer of Lost and Found*, was released in May and is the seventh installment of her popular *Beach House* series. Monroe has also published two children's books, which complement the environmental themes in her novels, and co-authored a middle grade book with Angela May called *The Islanders*, which was released in June.

The writer remains a passionate conservationist, serving on the board of the South Carolina Aquarium and its acclaimed Sea Turtle Care Center. Of her work on the beach, in the water, and at the keyboard, the author says, "I want to make a difference with my books and make people who didn't know they cared about sea turtles or dolphins or other wildlife feel my passion."

Related story

Saving sea turtles—Patrol the Isle of Palms with the Island Turtle Team, a cadre of dedicated citizen scientists who ensure hatchling sea turtles have a fighting chance at survival.

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Thank you

Thank you Mary Alice Munro for all of your work highlighting the importance of caring for our oceans and all the creatures that depend on that ocean – including us! I love all of your books each one somehow seems better than the last and you have a way of weaving family relationships into amazing stories of love, loss and so much more 🌸

Gwendolyn Maturo-Grasso 27 days ago | [reply](#)

Mary Alice Monroe

I have learned so much about turtles from MAM and her books! Actually I have learned about so many animals , insects , birds and nature from her books! I have always loved all this before, but she has taught me in depth in her 25 books that I have read! My house is now decorated with loggerhead turtles and I have one I am tracking now! She is a wonderful person and author!

Mary Cortright 27 days ago | [reply](#)

Mary Alice Monroe

Loved meeting her at the book signing for The Summer of Lost and Found at the Sumter County Museum! Such a warm and inviting woman!

Suzanne Sims 54 days ago | [reply](#)

Mary Alice Monroe

I just finished reading The Summer of Lost and Found and loved it, as I have all of her books. I discovered that I missed reading all of the Beach House series, so now I am going back to read them all.

Jayne Moore 55 days ago | [reply](#)

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