

FLATBACK - Endangered



Distribution:

Turbid inshore waters around Australia, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea.

Size: 200 lbs.

Age of Maturity: Unknown.

Nesting Habits: Nests four times

per season. Unlike other sea turtles, lays a smaller number of larger eggs.

KEMP'S RIDLEY - Critically Endangered

Distribution:

Found throughout the Gulf of Mexico and U.S. Atlantic seaboard.

Size: 100 lbs.

Age of Maturity: Between seven and 35 years.

Nesting Habits:

Females engage in synchronized nestings, returning to their natal beaches every one and a half years, and nest two to three times each season.



LEATHERBACK - Critically Endangered



Distribution: Highly migratory. They inhabit the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

Size: Up to 2000 lbs. Largest of the sea turtles.

Age of Maturity: Reproductively mature at 10 to 15 years.

Nesting Habits: Change nesting site from year to year.

DISEASE

Fibropapillomatosis is a disease first discovered in the 1930s that affects sea turtles, but mainly green turtles. The disease is characterized by the formation of internal and external tumors that can grow on the carapace, the flippers, around the eyes, in the mouth and on internal organs. Although its exact cause is unknown, it is thought to involve a herpes-type virus or viruses, coupled with environmental factors. Although most of the tumors are benign, large ones can interfere with essential life functions such as feeding, swimming or vision.

INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

A number of international treaties and organizations have been established to conserve sea turtles. All sea turtles are listed on Appendix I of CITES, which prohibits international trade in whole animals, their eggs or their parts. Unfortunately, many thousands are still smuggled across international borders as live specimens or as ornaments made from their parts.

The Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles went into effect in 2001, and with 12 contracting member countries across the Americas, is the only international treaty dedicated exclusively to sea turtles. Under the auspices of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, two Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) were completed with regard to sea turtles of the Atlantic Coast of Africa and in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean. Similarly, the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations have also signed an MOU concerning sea turtles in their waters.

Though non-binding, these agreements serve to implement a framework through which parties can share the responsibility of the conservation of their sea turtle populations. In the Caribbean, the Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network serves a similar purpose, raising public awareness and encouraging community involvement with sea turtle conservation efforts. Volunteers play an important role in the conservation efforts by monitoring nesting sites, relocating at-risk eggs to safer locations, and removing invasive plant species.

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

- Do not pollute or litter—anywhere. Reduce the amount of trash you produce, always dispose of trash responsibly, and clean up any trash you see on the beach.
- Limit your use of plastic items, especially bags and bottles, and use reusable items instead.
- Be cautious when purchasing souvenirs. Never purchase anything made from a turtle shell.
- Never purchase or consume turtle eggs or turtle meat. Avoid restaurants that sell these products and voice your opposition to the management.
- Keep away from beaches at night during the summer to avoid disturbing nesting sea turtles.
- Do not shine bright lights on the beach at night, and turn out your lights if you have property there.
- Don't drive or camp on the beach.
- Oppose coastal developments that introduce artificial lighting into the environment at night. Avoid irresponsible coastal hotels that do not educate their customers about sea turtles.
- Volunteer to help with beach monitoring programs.
- Contact tourism ministries in countries with nesting beaches or that sell turtle products and request that they create and enforce regulations.
- Engage in responsible ecotourism that respects the habitats of sea turtles.
- Never harass sea turtles, especially hatchlings and nesting females. If you witness or hear of harassment, contact the local Ministries of Environment and Tourism.



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DISTRIBUTION/STATUS

Sea turtles inhabit warm and temperate oceans throughout the world. Around for millions of years, the survival of these ancient animals is now seriously under threat, largely due to the actions of human beings. All seven species of sea turtles are listed as endangered—some critically—on the World Conservation Union’s Red List of Threatened Species. All species are also listed under the U.S. Endangered Species Act and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

POLLUTION

Marine debris, such as abandoned fishing gear, plastic bags and balloons, poses a serious threat to sea turtles. Highly pelagic and migratory, sea turtles may routinely encounter discarded human products, often with fatal results. Sea turtles regularly mistake plastic objects for food items which can cause a slow and agonizing death once ingested, either by blocking the airway or preventing food from getting to the stomach.

OLIVE RIDLEY – Endangered



Distribution: Mainly pelagic (found in the open sea). Found globally in the tropical regions of the South Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans.

Size: 100 lbs.

Age of Maturity: 15 years.

Nesting Habits: Nest in large groups called

“arribadas” (Spanish for “arrival”), in which hundreds to thousands of females come ashore to lay their eggs.

GREEN - Endangered

Distribution:

Coastal species. They can be found in the near-shore tropical and subtropical waters of more than 140 countries.

Size: 300 to 350 lbs.

Age of Maturity:

Reproductively mature anywhere between 20 and 50 years.

Nesting Habits: Females return to the same beaches where they were born every two to four years to lay eggs.



Caroline Rogers

Other abandoned human items—including fishing nets known as “ghost nets” for their invisibility to many marine creatures—kill millions of marine animals through entrapment. Scientists estimate that thousands of sea turtles die in this manner every year. Ghost nets can stretch for several miles and indiscriminately entangle vast numbers of animals who subsequently endure predation or slow deaths from starvation or suffocation. Nowadays these nets are made out of highly resistant nylon, so they may linger in the environment for months and even years.

FISHING PRACTICES

Sea turtles breathe air and must regularly surface to survive. They therefore risk drowning if they become entangled in fishing nets or hooked on fishing hooks. If animals manage to break free, they may drag the net with them, causing life-threatening injuries, interfering with behaviors necessary for survival, and making them vulnerable to predation.

Commercial shrimp trawl fisheries are notorious for their high level of marine animal bycatch, and are also responsible for an alarming number of sea turtle deaths. The invention of the Turtle Excluder Device has reduced the unintended catch of sea turtles by offering the animals a grid of bars located in the nets as an escape route. Unfortunately, regulation and enforcement of these devices varies greatly from nation to nation. In 1989, the U.S. enacted a law banning the importation of shrimp from fleets that

do not take adequate steps to protect sea turtles from harmful fishing technology. As a result of this embargo, many nations now require that their fisherman use TEDs, however some fishermen still flout the law.

POACHING

Humans have hunted sea turtles for centuries for their eggs, meat and shells. Changing attitudes towards sea turtles and recognition of the importance of preserving them as a species have led to bans on their deliberate killing in many countries. Poaching, however, still persists, especially in countries that lack effective monitoring and enforcement procedures. Levels of capture still remain high in parts of Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia. Aside from poaching by humans, sea turtle eggs and hatchlings can also be preyed upon by raccoons, stray dogs, crabs and predatory birds.

CLIMATE CHANGE

The looming threat of climate change presents potentially devastating effects for wildlife, particularly sea turtles. The incubation temperatures of sea turtle eggs determine the sex of the adults. Eggs that develop in higher temperatures (about 86 degrees and higher) produce females, whereas eggs in lower temperatures (lower than 86 degrees) yield males. Rising temperatures brought about by climate

LOGGERHEAD - Endangered

Distribution: Highly migratory. They can be found throughout the temperate and tropical regions of the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans.

Size: 250 lbs.

Age of Maturity: Reproductively mature at 35 years.

Nesting Habits:

Females travel thousands of miles from their nesting beaches, which are located from Japan to Florida, to their feeding grounds off Mexico and the North Atlantic. It is thought that females return to the same beaches to lay their eggs, perhaps with the aid of the Earth’s magnetic field. These transoceanic journeys take place every two or three years.



NOAA

HAWKSBILL – Critically Endangered



Caroline Rogers

Distribution:

Distributed in the tropical and subtropical waters of the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans. Typically found around coral reefs.

Size: 100 to 150 lbs.

Age of Maturity: Unknown.

Nesting Habits:

Females return to their

natal beaches every two to three years to nest approximately every 14 to 16 days during the nesting season. A female hawksbill generally has three to five nests per season, which contain an average of 130 eggs.

change could eventually lead to the extinction of sea turtles by advancing female-only populations.

Other effects of climate change on sea turtles include disappearing coastlines due to rising sea levels and warming ocean temperatures, which can decrease the availability of prey. Increased temperatures also degrade coral reefs, which some sea turtles, especially hawksbills, depend upon for food and habitat.

TERRESTRIAL THREATS

Although sea turtles are largely aquatic animals, as their name suggests, they are dependent on the terrestrial environment for one of the most important aspects of their survival: nesting. Sea turtles prefer to nest on sandy beaches, making them very sensitive to habitat degradation as a result of coastal development and tourism. These activities can render beaches unsuitable for nesting, or may damage pre-existing nests. Lights from buildings located near shore areas can also deter females from nesting, and because of their inclination to move towards the brightest direction, hatchlings can easily become disoriented by artificial lights which can lead them away from the ocean and expose them to predators. The dense roots from non-native vegetation can also create yet another obstacle for nesting females and hatchlings.