

Leather back

(Dermochelys coriacea)

The name of this turtle has English origins and it refers to the turtle's unique carapace. Other marine turtles have rigid shells comprised of a few large, flattened bones covered in horny scales. The leatherback's carapace consists of thousands of small, flat bones, which have a rubbery covering. Seven prominent ridges run the length of the back for stream lining. This particular species grows up to 3 meters in length, and females weigh 250 - 500 kg. Leatherbacks feed exclusively on jellyfish. Leatherbacks nest in tropical zones, but spend the rest of their lives in the open ocean, ranging from subarctic waters in the north to the Antarctic convergence in the south! These ancient turtles can dive to more than 4000 feet!



Turtle Regulations of The Bahamas

- The annual closed season is from April 31st to July 31st.
- During the closed season it is illegal to take or have in possession any live or fresh turtle without a permit.
- It is illegal to capture any species of turtle on any beach.
- The possession, sale or purchase of turtle eggs is prohibited.
- It is illegal to take, possess or capture any Hawksbill turtle, Green turtle under the size of 24 inches or Loggerhead under the size of 30 inches.
- Measurement should be made from the front edge of the neck scales proceeding along the middle of the back to the end of the shell.

If these gentle creatures are to survive, people must respect them in their habitat and also become aware of human behaviors and activities which could harm them.

What Can You Do?

- Enforce the fisheries laws and regulations regarding sea turtles.
- Don't harass sea turtles at sea or on land. Don't disturb turtles in feeding or resting areas, shine lights on nesting turtles, or ride turtles.
- Protect feeding areas by not discarding plastic or waste at sea. Never anchor on coral reefs or sea grass, or touch living coral when diving.
- Do not purchase products made from sea turtles, either at home or when you travel.
- Report all violations to the Department of Marine Resources.

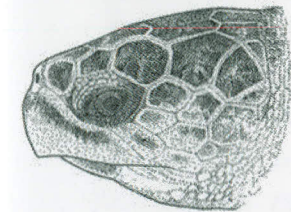
**Department of Marine Resources
P.O. Box N-3028
Nassau, New Providence**

Telephone: (242) 393-1014/5

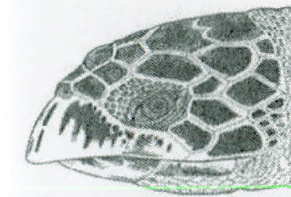
Fax: (242) 393-0238

Email: fisheries@bahamas.gov.bs

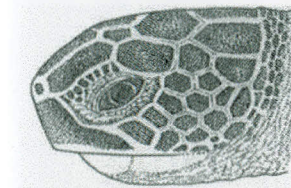
MARINE TURTLES OF THE BAHAMAS



Loggerhead



Hawksbill



Green



Leatherback

Introduction

Sea turtles are gentle reptiles which have adapted to life in the ocean. The stout, scaly legs of their cousins, the tortoises, have been transformed into slender, powerful flippers. The bony shell, which protects the turtle from predators, has been reduced somewhat in order to make sea turtles more buoyant and manoeuvrable in their watery home. Sea turtles have lungs, so whilst they are at home in the ocean, they must come regularly to the surface to breathe air. The only time the turtle leaves the sea is to lay her eggs. This important event involves a migration of hundreds even thousands of miles because feeding and nesting grounds are often widely separated. A female deposits several clutches of eggs during the breeding season, leaving each to incubate in the warm sand of a tropical beach. When the baby turtles hatch, they struggle free from the deep nest hole and head to the sea. This timeless cycle began in the Age of the Dinosaurs and continues to this day. There are seven species of sea turtles and the following are found in The Bahamas.

Loggerhead

(*Caretta caretta*)

The name of this species was derived from its large head, up to 25 cm wide. Large, muscular jaws are ideal for crushing prey such as heavy-shelled clams, conch, sea urchins and crabs. Loggerheads are a reddish-brown in color. The shell is very thick, especially towards the back, which serves as protection from sharks. They can grow up to one meter in length and weigh up to 180 kg. This species can dive to 230 meters or more, staying submerged for more than 30 minutes. Loggerheads reach sexual maturity between 20 and 30 years of age. Amazingly, young loggerheads spend several years in the Eastern Atlantic before crossing the ocean back to The Bahamas where they mature to adulthood.

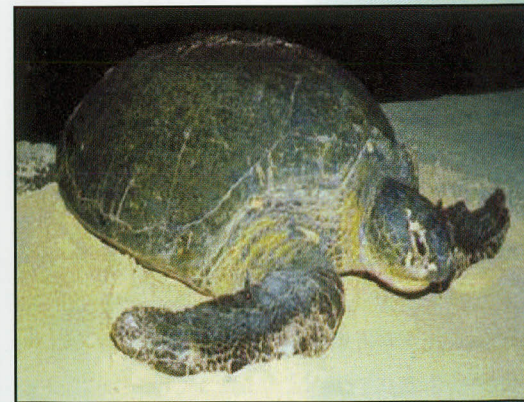


Green Turtle

(*Chelonia mydas*)

This species name refers to the colour of the fat found under its shell. Turtle soup is made from this fat. The coloration of the shell ranges from a light to dark brown. The carapaces often have dark brown blotches or radiating streaks. Green turtles are herbivores. Their diet consists of seaweed and seagrass. As a result of its diet, the turtle's internal tissues absorb the pigments from the plants. It is interesting to know that as hatchlings, they are carnivores!

Green turtles grow to an average of one meter in length and can weigh up to 230 kg. The Caribbean once supported hundreds of millions of green turtles, but many large colonies were eliminated centuries ago by commercial harvest.



Hawksbill

(*Eretmochelys imbricata*)

This species is a member of the coral reef community. These turtles feed primarily on sponges. Their shell is basically brown in colour and depicts an exquisite pattern.

Hawksbill turtles are critically endangered because for centuries they have been captured and killed for their shell. The hawksbill turtle is one of the smaller species of marine turtles. This species grows up to 90 cm and can weigh 80 kg. Like other sea turtles, hawksbills are slow maturing and long lived, and travel widely throughout their lives.

