



WORLD OF WONDER

Exploring the realms of history, science, nature and technology

SEA TURTLES

These ancient and majestic marine reptiles can be found in oceans around the world. Some migrate thousands of miles between oceans; others live in specific regions. There are seven species of sea turtle, and most are in danger of extinction.

The **flatback** lives in the coastal coral reefs and grassy shallows of Australia and Indonesia. This sea turtle feeds largely on sea cucumbers and crustaceans.

The flatback grows up to 38 inches (100 cm) long and can weigh up to 198 pounds (90 kg).

Bringing up baby

It takes decades for sea turtles to reach maturity and breeding age. Some females are 35 years or older before they reproduce.

Scientists are not sure how long sea turtles live, but if they survive into adulthood, some live 80 years or longer.

Each species has its own nesting habits, but many return to the beach where they hatched (nesting every two to four years).

Females come ashore (usually at night) and, using their rear flippers, dig nests in the sand. Each female will lay a **clutch** of 50 to 100 leathery white eggs. The female covers the nest with sand and returns to the sea. The whole process takes 30 to 60 minutes.

The sex of sea turtles is determined by the temperature in the nest. Cooler temperatures produce male hatchlings, and warmer temperatures produce female hatchlings.

Incubation takes 45 to 70 days, and the eggs in a nest often hatch together at night. As soon as the eggs hatch, the babies start digging out of their hole. This process can take up to a week. Once they reach the surface, they instinctively head toward the sea.

Did you know?

Sea turtles often drown when caught in fishing gear.

Most sea turtles prefer warm oceans, but leatherbacks can be found in colder waters near Alaska, Canada and Iceland.

Most sea turtles nest at night.

Unlike other turtles, a sea turtle cannot retract its flippers and head into its shell.

Some turtles nest in large groups, called **arribadas**. Only the two ridley turtles, Kemp's ridley and the olive ridley, display this arribada nesting behavior.

Named for its green shell, the **olive ridley** (or Pacific ridley) is one of the most abundant sea turtles in the world. It grows to 31 inches (80 cm) long and weighs about 100 pounds (45 kg).

The basics

Sea turtles are living fossils that have been on Earth for more than 100 million years. They hatch from eggs on land and live most of their lives in the ocean. Males almost never return to land. Females often travel long distances to the beaches where they were born to lay their eggs.

To breathe, sea turtles must come to the surface.

Food for thought

Sea turtles are mostly **omnivores**, eating plants and animals. Many species migrate long distances between feeding grounds.

Their diet includes algae and sea grasses, as well as crabs, fish and shrimp. Some species have more specialized diets. For example, hawksbills live mostly on sponges, and leatherbacks prefer to eat jellyfish.

Survival

Six of the seven species of sea turtles are threatened or **endangered**, mostly due to human activity. Accidental capture by fishing gear, which often results in death, is the greatest threat to most sea turtles. They are also killed for their eggs, meat, skin and shells, and they suffer from poaching and over-exploitation. Climate change also impacts sea turtle nesting beaches and eggs.

Hatchlings are extremely vulnerable, and only about 1 in 1,000 baby sea turtles survives to adulthood. On land, birds, crabs, cats, dogs, foxes, insects and raccoons eat them. Once in the ocean, seabirds and fish prey on them.

People can help protect the turtles by not disturbing nests or eggs and by not purchasing items made from turtle shells.

The **leatherback** is the largest of sea turtles, growing up to 8 feet (2.4 m) long and weighing up to 2,000 pounds (750 kg). Unlike the shells of other sea turtles, which are bony and scaly, the leatherback's carapace has few bones and is mostly covered in leathery skin.

Leatherbacks are highly migratory, some swimming more than 10,000 miles a year.

Leatherbacks have been known to dive nearly 4,000 feet (1,200 m) — deeper than most marine mammals.

Kemp's ridley (also called the Atlantic ridley) is the smallest of sea turtles. It grows to about 28 inches (70 cm) long and weighs about 100 pounds (45 kg).

The **green sea turtle** lives in tropical and subtropical seas around the world. It grows up to 5 feet (1.5 m) in length and can weigh more than 700 pounds (300 kg).

Named for its broad head and neck, the **loggerhead** grows up to 3 feet (1 m) long and 250 pounds (110 kg).

Named for its pointed beak, the **hawksbill** is a critically endangered sea turtle. It grows up to 45 inches (110 cm) long and weighs up to 150 pounds (70 kg).

Its shell displays subtle color changes depending on water temperature. Sadly, these shells were often used as decorative items in peoples' homes.

Female hawksbill turtles return to the same nesting grounds where they were born to lay their eggs.

SOURCES: World Book Encyclopedia, World Book Inc.; <https://www.britannica.com>; <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov>; <https://www.seaturtles.org>; <https://www.worldwildlife.org>; <https://www.livescience.com>

© 2021 Triefeldt Studios, Inc.
Distributed by Andrews McMeel Syndication

LEARN ABOUT **PARAGUAY** IN THE NEXT INSTALLMENT OF WORLD OF WONDER

CASA GRANDE
Dispatch
Serving Pinal County For More Than A Century

Newspapers
in **Education**

**OUR SCHOOLS OFFER MANY
AMENITIES TO OUR STUDENTS:**

- Free Transportation
- Before/After School Programs
- Gifted Programs
- Free Competitive Sports

JOIN THE CGESD FAMILY TODAY! (520) 836-2111