

# Sea Turtle Fact Sheet

Sea turtles are ancient ocean dwellers that have lived on the Earth for 150 million years, since before the time of the dinosaurs.

Major threats that have brought all seven species of sea turtles to the edge of extinction are:

- ◆ large-scale poaching of adult turtles for meat, shells and leather;
- ◆ drowning of sea turtles in shrimp nets;
- ◆ drowning of sea turtles in tuna and swordfish fisheries;
- ◆ development and destruction of nesting beaches;
- ◆ pollution of the oceans;
- ◆ commercial exploitation of sea turtle eggs.

## Olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*)

◆ The olive ridley is one of two species with a phenomenal nesting behavior known as *arribada* (Spanish for "arrival"): Breeding turtles congregate in the waters in front of the nesting beach and then, signaled by some, as yet unknown, cue, they emerge from the sea en masse.

◆ As many as 610,000 females may nest in one *arribada* which may continue for several days.

## Hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*)

◆ Because the hawksbill sea turtle's shell is so beautiful, they have been harvested since Egyptian times. The fashion style known as "tortoiseshell" is based upon the pattern of hawksbill shells. Historically, traders would pay as much as \$100/lb (\$225/kg) for hawksbill shell. Shell trade is banned by an international treaty, but illegal trade still occurs.

◆ Females nest each season in at least 60 different tropical and subtropical countries.

## Green Sea Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*)

◆ Green sea turtles (also known as black sea turtles) are the most widespread species of sea turtle, residing near 139 countries in the tropics and subtropics. They are found around North America, South America, Africa, Europe and Asia.

◆ Adult green sea turtles are herbivores, and their food includes sea grasses and algae. Young green sea turtles, however, are omnivores.

## Kemp's ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*)

◆ Of the 7 species of sea turtles, the Kemp's ridleys have long been considered the most endangered. There are only 2,500 nesting females left in the world today. However, just 50 years ago, 40,000 females were filmed nesting in just one day at a single beach.

◆ The Kemp's ridley is the only sea turtle that consistently nests during the day.

## Loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*)

◆ The loggerhead is the most common sea turtle found in the U.S.

◆ The main nesting colonies of the loggerhead sea turtle are located on the Atlantic coast of Florida, United States and on Masirah Island, Oman. It is estimated that 30,000 loggerheads nest each year on Masirah Island and 14,000 in Florida.

## Leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*)

◆ Worldwide, leatherback populations are extremely endangered. The Pacific leatherback population has suffered a 95% decline since 1980 throughout its range and is in imminent danger of extinction.

◆ The largest known sea turtle was a male leatherback, found on the coast of Wales in 1988. It was 9.5 feet long (about 3 meters) and weighed almost 2,000 pounds (908 kg).

◆ The leatherback is the only sea turtle without a shell. Its outer protection is a leathery, scaleless skin made of tough, oil-saturated tissue raised into seven prominent ridges, giving rise to its name. Its back is brownish-black with white spots.

## Flatback (*Natator depressus*)

◆ The flatback sea turtle gets its name from its flat carapace (top shell); other turtles have an arched shell.

◆ This species is confined to the tropical areas of the Australian continental shelf, including the Indonesian archipelago, Irian Jaya, and Papua New Guinea.

