

# THE SEA TURTLE



Having traveled the seas for over 100 million years, sea turtles have survived the extinction of the dinosaurs and are still present in the world's oceans today, but they are struggling for their lives and their future. Here is a look at the sea turtle.

Research and illustration by ROB SMOAK / staff

## SEA TURTLE SPECIES

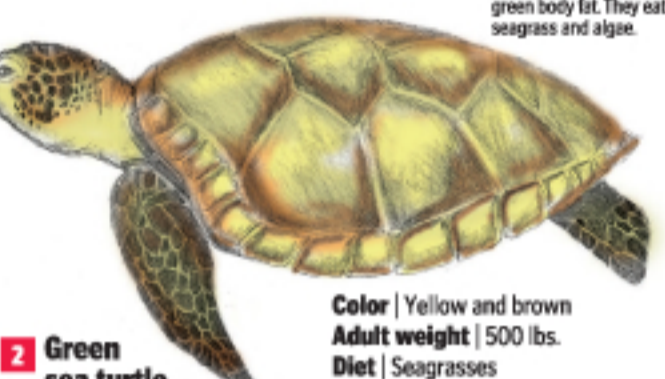
There are seven known species of sea turtles that inhabit our oceans. With the exception of the Australian flatback, all are listed as threatened or endangered. Here are the seven species of sea turtles:



**1 Australian Flatback**

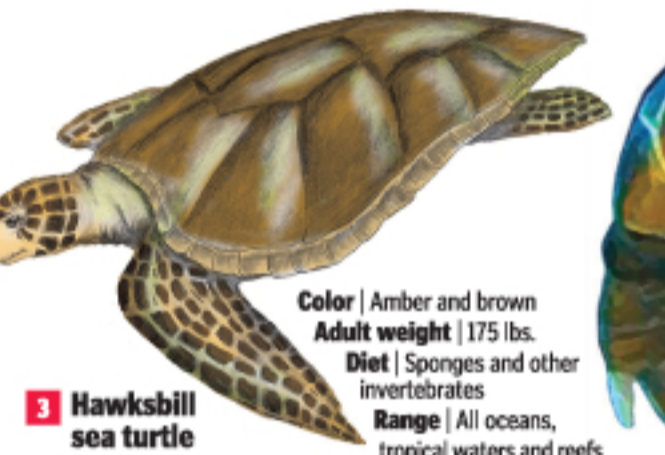
**Color** | Olive gray  
**Adult weight** | 200 lbs.  
**Diet** | Omnivore  
**Range** | Coastal Australia

Note: Green turtles have green body fat. They eat seagrass and algae.



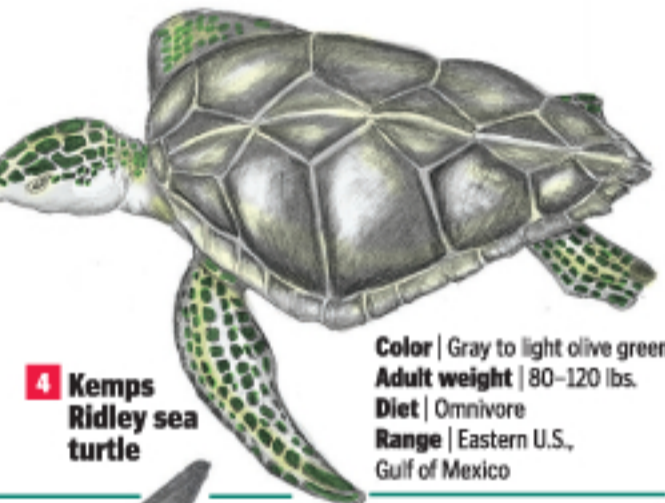
**2 Green sea turtle**

**Color** | Yellow and brown  
**Adult weight** | 500 lbs.  
**Diet** | Seagrasses  
**Range** | Subtropical and tropical seas, bays and coastal waters



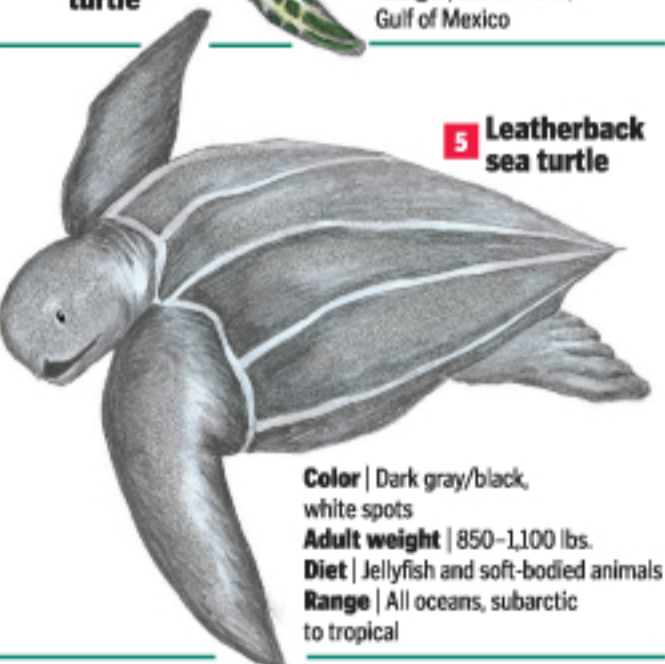
**3 Hawksbill sea turtle**

**Color** | Amber and brown  
**Adult weight** | 175 lbs.  
**Diet** | Sponges and other invertebrates  
**Range** | All oceans, tropical waters and reefs



**4 Kemp's Ridley sea turtle**

**Color** | Gray to light olive green  
**Adult weight** | 80–120 lbs.  
**Diet** | Omnivore  
**Range** | Eastern U.S., Gulf of Mexico



**5 Leatherback sea turtle**

**Color** | Dark gray/black, white spots  
**Adult weight** | 850–1,100 lbs.  
**Diet** | Jellyfish and soft-bodied animals  
**Range** | All oceans, subarctic to tropical



**6 Olive Ridley sea turtle**

**Color** | Gray to olive green  
**Adult weight** | 100–130 lbs.  
**Diet** | Omnivore  
**Range** | Tropical waters of Pacific, Indian and South Atlantic oceans

## Sea turtle sizes

Some of the world's seven species:



## FACTS ABOUT THE LOGGERHEAD SEA TURTLE

The loggerhead sea turtle is the most common sea turtle found off the shore of the Carolinas

- Loggerhead turtles are so called because of their large heads, which are designed to crush their hard-bodied prey, such as crabs and shellfish.
- The shells of loggerhead turtles are home to barnacles and over a hundred additional species of invertebrates, such as anemones, sponges and small shrimp.
- Masirah (an island in Oman) loggerheads glow when you touch them! Their shells get covered with bioluminescent plankton, which reacts to touch by emitting light.
- Loggerheads are capable of tremendous migrations. One turtle was tracked all the way from Mexico to Japan; she swam the whole of the Pacific!
- They are found in all the major oceans, generally in temperate and subtropical areas, although some are found near the equator.
- It may take 15-30 years for loggerheads to reach maturity.
- The temperature of the nest determines the sex of the hatchlings.
- Loggerhead sea turtles nest approximately every 12 days during the nesting season.
- Each clutch that a female lays contains 80-120 pingpong-ball-sized eggs.
- Loggerhead turtles typically lay two to six clutches every two to three years
- Cape Island, S.C. is the most important nesting area for the loggerhead northern subpopulation.

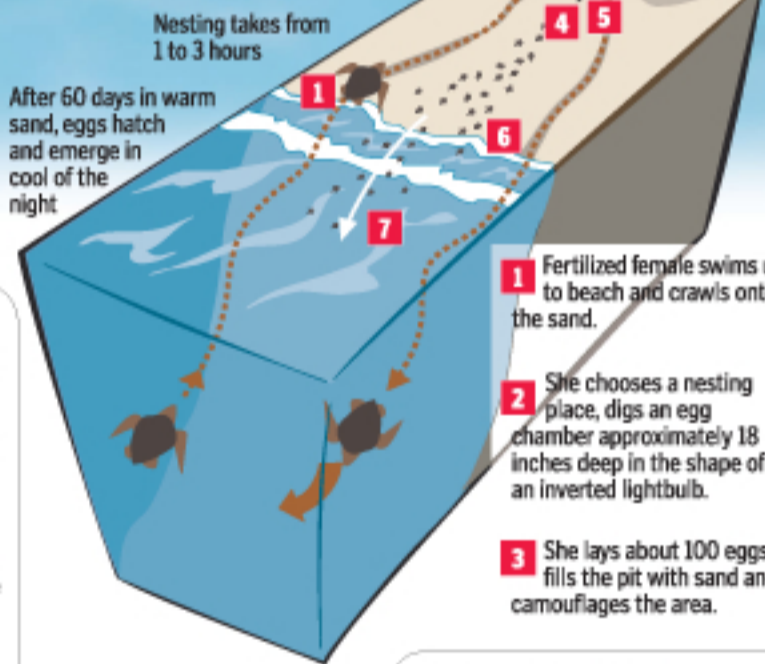


### 7 Loggerhead sea turtle

**Color** | Red brown to brown  
**Adult weight** | 220-400 lbs.  
**Diet** | Heavy-shelled animals such as crabs and clams  
**Range** | All oceans, primarily temperate waters, near shore, often near structures (wrecks, platforms).

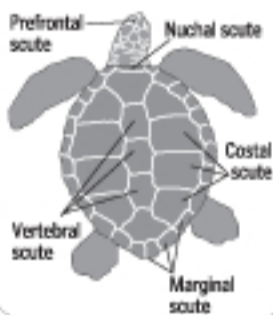
## HOW THEY NEST

Mature females mate and nest once every two or three years — during the warmest nights of the year on tropical and subtropical beaches.



## SCUTE

Scute are the scale-looking parts of a sea turtle.



North and South Carolina offer endangered species license plates for an extra fee, with some of the proceeds going to help the sea turtle.

## IN THE DARK

For hatching sea turtles, artificial light is a killer. Instinct drives them from their nests on beaches toward the brightest horizon, ideally the waterline on an undeveloped coast. But the bright lights of coastal development—streetlamps, illuminated parking lots and buildings—can disorient nesting, egg-laden female turtles and lure newly hatched baby turtles toward artificial light sources. As hatchlings turn away from the sea to cross into streets and parking lots, they are invariably killed.



A bumper sticker sponsored by Santee Cooper along with a program are designed to help save the sea turtles and create more nesting areas. For more info, go to [santeecooper.com/environment/seaturtles/](http://santeecooper.com/environment/seaturtles/)

## BEACH TIPS TO PROTECT SEA TURTLES

- Don't leave litter on the beach. Wildlife may mistake your trash for food (especially plastic bags that look like jellyfish) or become entangled.
- Knock down your sandcastles and fill any holes before you leave the beach. They can interfere with mother sea turtles trying to lay eggs or trap baby sea turtles trying to find the sea.
- Remove all furniture, umbrellas, chairs, toys and other items from the beach when you are finished for the day. They can interfere with mother sea turtles trying to lay eggs or trap baby sea turtles trying to find the sea.
- Don't help sea turtle hatchlings into the water. They have to flex their muscles before trying to swim and the crawl to the ocean may help in the development of their navigational ability.
- Don't camp on the beach. Mother turtles may bump into you and give up nesting that night.
- Don't drive on the beach. You could crush sea turtle eggs, hatchlings or grown sea turtles.
- Don't go on the beach at night. The less disturbances, the more likely turtle nesting efforts will be successful.
- Respect the environment wherever you go.
- Visit the local wildlife organizations. Your friendly support matters!

## HOW TO HELP

**ORGANIZATIONS:**  
**International Coastal Cleanup, September 15, 2007** | Hosted by the Ocean Conservancy, [www.oceanconservancy.org/icc](http://www.oceanconservancy.org/icc)  
**S.C. Unites Turtle Enthusiasts (SCUTE)** | For more information, call 843-237-9821 or Huntington Beach State Park at 843-237-4440.

**Topsail Sea Turtle Project** | Volunteer with a sea turtle hospital, Topsail Island, N.C. [www.seaturtlehospital.org/](http://www.seaturtlehospital.org/)

**ON THE WEB:**  
[www.seaturtle.org](http://www.seaturtle.org)  
[www.dnr.sc.gov/seaturtles/](http://www.dnr.sc.gov/seaturtles/)  
[santeecooper.com/environment/seaturtles/](http://santeecooper.com/environment/seaturtles/)  
[beachwtex.org](http://beachwtex.org)  
[www.ncwildlife.org](http://www.ncwildlife.org)