



## Sea Turtle Identification Guide

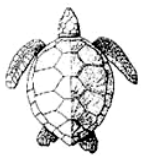
Sea turtles have been around for over 100 million years but nowadays only seven species remain of what a previously large and diverse marine radiation of turtles. These are the Flatback, Green, Hawksbill, Kemp's Ridley, Leatherback, Loggerhead and Olive Ridley. An eighth species, the Black turtle (*Chelonia agassizii*), is recognised as a separate species by some biologists, but skull morphological and DNA data published shows that this species is most likely a subspecies of the Green turtle *Chelonia mydas* (*Chelonia mydas agassizii*).

The following information will help you to identify sub adult or adult turtles.



### Flatback (*Natator depressus*)

Hard flat carapace with four lateral scutes, coloration mainly olive grey with pale brown / yellow tones at edges of scutes, maximum carapace length to about 99cm, weight up to about 90kg, found only around the tropical waters of Australia. Their main diet is jellyfish, sea pens and soft-bodied invertebrates.



### Green Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*)

Head small and round, hard carapace with four lateral scutes, coloration mainly light to dark brown but can be shaded with olive, maximum carapace length to about 122cm, weight up to about 204kg, found throughout tropical and sub-tropical Atlantic, Indian and Pacific oceans. Their main diet is sea grass (turtle grass) and rooted algae.



### Hawksbill Turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*)

Head long and narrow with pointed beak, hard carapace with four lateral scutes, coloration mainly dark amber with brown or black streaks, maximum carapace length to about 89cm, weight up to about 74kg, found mainly along coral reefs in tropical oceans. Their main diet is sponges.



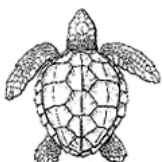
### Kemp's Ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*)

Hard carapace with five lateral scutes, coloration gray to olive-green unmarked; maximum carapace length to about 70 cm; weight up to about 45kg; Caribbean and North Atlantic. Their main diet is clams, crabs and snails.



### Leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*)

Leathery thin skin, scuteless black carapace with seven prominent longitudinal ridges, coloration black with white spots, carapace length to about 180 cm, weight up to 900kg, found in all oceans except Arctic and Antarctic, temperate or tropical. Their main diet is jellyfish.



### Loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*)

Head very large with strong crushing jaw, hard carapace with 5 lateral scutes, coloration reddish brown, maximum carapace length to about 124cm, weight up to about 200kg, found in estuaries, continental shelf and pelagic (open) ocean. Their main diet is crabs, molluscs, assorted invertebrates and sea pens.



### Olive Ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*)

Hard carapace with seven lateral scutes, coloration olive-green, maximum carapace length to about 72cm, weight up to about 43kg, found in Atlantic, Indian and tropical Pacific oceans. Their main diet is clams, crabs, jellyfish and snails, they also eat some algae.

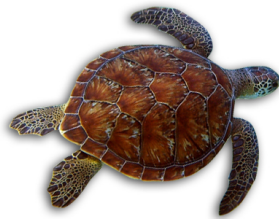
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**Flatback** (*Natator depressus*)



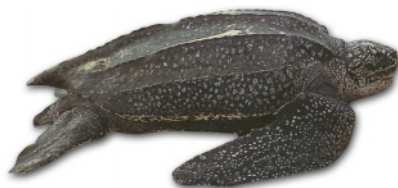
**Green Turtle** (*Chelonia mydas*)



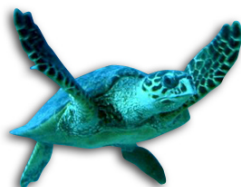
**Hawksbill Turtle** (*Eretmochelys imbricata*)



**Kemp's Ridley** (*Lepidochelys kempii*)



**Leatherback** (*Dermochelys coriacea*)



**Loggerhead** (*Caretta caretta*)



**Olive Ridley** (*Lepidochelys olivacea*)

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## Sea Turtle Threats

Turtles are still hunted around the world for their meat and shells. A real threat to future populations is the collection of their eggs for food and the misconception in some parts of the world that they are an aphrodisiac. Turtles had been hunted sustainably for many centuries but modern fishing methods have caused their populations to crash completely in the last 50 to 100 years.

Many thousands of turtles are caught each year as 'by-catch' in other fisheries industries both by nets and longlines. As they cannot surface to breathe they slowly drown. Many also fall victim to propeller strikes from boats. Many uneducated fishermen kill sea turtles in the belief that are depriving them of fish. This simply is not the case.

Sea turtles often mistake discarded plastic bags for jellyfish (a large part of their diet) and end up choking on them or having their intestines blocked so they can no longer eat. Pollution of the seas through oil spills and rubbish dumping also poses a serious threat to their survival.

Sea turtle hatchlings emerging on beaches often mistake terrestrial lights for the moon and consequently move away from the sea where they either die or are eaten by predators. Sea turtles nest on beaches and mothers return to nest in the same area they were born, many of these nesting beaches are now being developed, destroying nesting grounds for future generations.

## What you can do

- Report any stranded or washed up Sea Turtle (dead or alive) to your local authority
- Boycott hotels and resorts at nesting beaches that don't turn down their beach lights and bring in their beach furniture at night during the local nesting season
- Inform family and friends about the plight of the Sea Turtles and the effects of longlining
- Do not use powered craft or jet skis near nesting beaches during the nesting season
- Do not buy any turtle or tortoiseshell products
- Bring home all rubbish from the beach as this can get washed out to sea
- Don't support unethical developments around nesting beaches
- Petition your local public representative about the effects of longline fisheries



*Sea Turtle trapped in fishing net*



*Sea Turtle attacked by fisherman*

**Conservation through education and action.**