

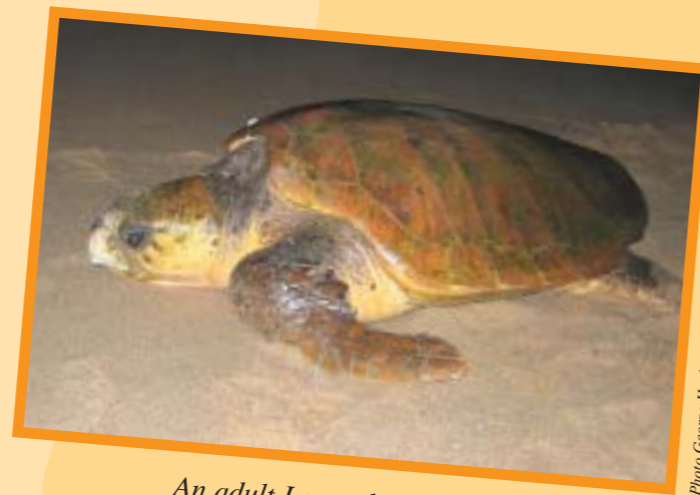
Saving Turtles



Sea turtles are reptiles that have been around for 150 million years – since before the time of the dinosaurs! Seven species survive in our oceans today, two of which breed on our shores. These are the Loggerhead and Leatherback turtles. Green, Hawksbill and Olive Ridley turtles also visit our coastal waters.

Loggerheads

Loggerheads are our most common sea turtles. They grow to about one metre long and their shell plates are arranged in a distinctive pattern. They spend most of their lives at sea, but females come ashore during the breeding season from October to February each year. They haul themselves out of the water and up to above the high-water mark, where they dig a deep hole in the sand with their back flippers. Here they lay about 120 eggs before covering them with sand and heading back to the sea. Each female may lay several batches of eggs during one breeding season.



An adult Loggerhead turtle.



Loggerhead hatchlings.

After three to five years, when they reach about 70 cm, Loggerheads abandon their ocean life and move inshore. Here they establish a territory, and feed on mussels, lobsters, crabs and cuttlefish. At about 12 years old they reach breeding age and migrate back to the beaches where they hatched. Here the males will fertilise the females before they leave the water to lay their eggs.

Turtle eggs hatch after three months and the hatchlings emerge together at night to race down the beach to the ocean. Many are caught on the beach by ghost crabs and seagulls, and in the water by waiting fish and sharks. Only about half of them survive the first two hours at sea! When they reach the safety of deeper water they drift in the ocean currents feeding on jellyfish and bluebottles that float at the sea surface.



Turtle tracks.



A leatherback hatchling.

Leatherbacks

Leatherbacks are the largest living reptiles, and the largest turtle species in the world. They grow to about 2.5 metres, but the largest leatherback ever found was 3 metres long and weighed 908 kg! Instead of a shell of plates, they have leathery backs with seven raised ridges running from head to tail. Worldwide, leatherbacks are highly endangered and only a few breed on our shores.



Turtles in danger

All turtle species are endangered because of human activities. The main reasons are:

- ⊙ Poaching.
- ⊙ Pollution – especially by bits of plastic that turtles mistake for food.
- ⊙ Fishing activities – especially the long-line and shrimp netting industries. A recent survey of the long-line tuna fishing industry has shown that 200 000 Loggerheads and 50 000 Leatherbacks are accidentally killed each year!
- ⊙ Development – building on the seashore and destroying nesting beaches.
- ⊙ Collection of turtle eggs and meat for food, and turtle shells for the tourist trade. Body parts are also used for traditional medicines.
- ⊙ The presence of people and lights that can prevent female turtles from coming ashore. Lights also distract hatchlings from heading straight for the safety of the ocean.



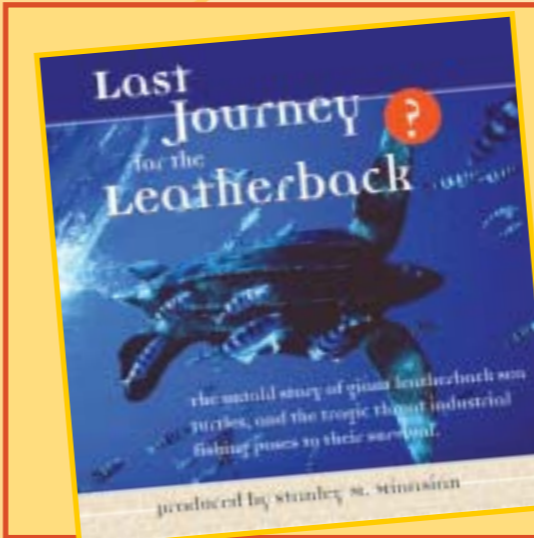
A hatchling at the sea.

How can you help?

- 👉 Learn about turtles and tell others about them.
- 👉 Do not litter, and help with clean-ups. This also applies to people living far from the sea because plastic pollution is carried by our rivers to the ocean.
- 👉 Never buy turtle products.
- 👉 Support turtle conservation.



Make a turtle – see p.19.



Win a DVD – Last Journey for the Leatherback?

The *Sea Turtle Restoration Project* in America is working to inform people and governments about the plight of the world's sea turtles. They have offered **15 lucky EnviroKids readers**, both children and teachers, a copy of their 30-minute documentary that tells the story of the leatherbacks, and the threats to their survival. There is also a teacher lesson plan and a petition for schoolchildren to save the turtles. Copies will be sent with each DVD, or can be downloaded from www.seaturtles.org. This documentary makes great viewing for all ages and should be shared with as many people as possible. Visit the website for more information.

WIN ... WIN ... To win a copy of *Last Journey for the Leatherback?*, write to *EnviroKids* telling us who you would invite to see the show (family, friends, class or community) so that they too can learn about our endangered turtles. Remember to include a copy of the competition entry form on p. 23 providing all your details.