

Sea Turtle Fact Sheet

Flatback Turtle (*Natator depressus*)

Endangered Sea Turtles

Ancient ocean dwellers, sea turtles have lived on the Earth for 150 million years, since before the time of the dinosaurs. All seven species of sea turtles are endangered and protected under various national laws and international treaties. Sea turtles' hydrodynamic body shape and paddle-shaped limbs or flippers make them agile swimmers. Though fully adapted to marine life, sea turtles depend on land to complete the most critical stage of their life cycle, reproduction. They build their nests and deposit their eggs only on tropical and subtropical sandy beaches.

Appearance

This species of sea turtle gets its name from its flat carapace (top shell); other turtles have an arched shell. The adult carapace shell color is olive-gray.

Weight: 198 lbs (90 kg)

Carapace length: 3.25 feet (100 cm.)

Status

The flatback turtle is listed as vulnerable under the Australian Commonwealth's Endangered Species Protection Act of 1992. It also is listed under Appendix 1 (prohibited international trade) by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

Habitat and Feeding Behavior

Flatbacks live in inshore waters, bays and shallow sea beds. While flatbacks have the smallest migratory range of any sea turtle species, they do migrate up to 1300 km. This species is confined to the tropical areas of the Australia continental shelf, including the Indonesian archipelago, Irian Jaya and Papua New Guinea.

Food: The food of the adult flatback includes sea cucumbers, jellyfish, mollusks, prawns, bryozoans, other invertebrates and seaweed.



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Nesting

The flatback exclusively breeds and nests in Australia, and lays approximately 50 eggs per nest, the fewest of any species of sea turtle. The nesting population is estimated to be 5,000 to 10,000 females. Nesting season usually occurs from November to February, though, in the Northern Territory, it is year-round with a peak in August. Hatchlings emerge from nests from late December to late March after a 6-week incubation. The foraging of nests by pigs and varanid lizards is a significant threat. At one nesting site in the Northern Territory, predation accounted for more than 50 percent of nest mortality.

Primary breeding grounds: The significant nesting sites of the flatback are in Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia.

Threats

Major threats to the survival of the flatback turtle include:

- ◆ egg predation at rookeries;
- ◆ indigenous harvest of adults and eggs;
- ◆ drowning in shrimp and gill nets; and
- ◆ ocean pollution.