

Sea Turtle Fact Sheet

Loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*)

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

The shell of the loggerhead is a brown to reddish-brown color. Loggerheads grow as long as four feet. The loggerhead has adapted to its sea life. It has long flippers and special glands that help it to drink salt water. While the loggerhead is a relatively slow swimmer, it can show amazing bursts of speed when it feels threatened. The natural threats to this sea turtle are sharks and orcas.

Weight: 250 lbs (113.5 kg)

Carapace length: up to 4 feet (121 cm)

Status

Loggerhead sea turtles are a threatened species. They were listed June 2, 1970 under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

Habitat and Feeding Behavior

Loggerheads live in coastal bays, estuaries, lagoons, and open oceans in warm and temperate waters. Loggerheads occur worldwide, in areas such as North and South America, Europe, Australia, Africa and Asia. The loggerhead is the most common sea turtle found in the United States.

Food: The food of the adult loggerhead includes crabs, fish, mollusks, jellyfish, sea urchins, sponges and shrimp.



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Nesting

Loggerheads nest in warm temperate and subtropical areas. Loggerheads may take from 15-20 years to reach reproductive maturity. Loggerheads lay from 105-120 eggs in each nest. Incubation takes from 55-60 days, and the average hatchling is 1.5 to 2 inches (3.8 to 5.1 cm) long and weighs .8 oz (20 g). Like all sea turtles, the sex of the hatchling is determined by the temperature of the sand during incubation. Warmer temperatures result in female hatchlings and colder temperatures in male hatchlings.

Primary breeding grounds: 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.

Threats

Major threats to the survival of the loggerhead turtle include:

- ◆ drowning of sea turtles in shrimp nets;
- ◆ accidental catching and drowning of sea turtles in tuna and swordfish fisheries;
- ◆ development and destruction of nesting beaches;
- ◆ ocean pollution;
- ◆ noise pollution; and
- ◆ boat collisions.

