

## Delaware's Sea Turtle

As you watch over the Delaware Bay, light ripples form in the current before a large turtle head with strong jaws pokes out of the water. It's an amazingly rare sight to see, yet the loggerhead sea turtle is the most common sea turtle in Delaware. The Delaware Bay and surrounding coastal areas serve as the ideal habitat for this turtle, and the species has a strong history with Delaware. This makes the loggerhead the perfect species to hold the title of Delaware's sea turtle.

Every year after nesting season, loggerhead sea turtles travel over 1,000 miles to Mid-Atlantic waters for annual summer and fall foraging. The Delaware Bay is lucky enough to have the prime conditions for a seasonal loggerhead habitat. The area is home to the largest population of horseshoe crabs, which are a major part of a loggerheads diet. According to Delaware Bay Horseshoe Crab survey, "[NMFS] identified horseshoe crabs in 75 percent of loggerhead stomach contents." The Delaware Bay also provides other food sources and security. "Loggerheads are found foraging in the Delaware Bay during the summer and fall, which is home to a large number of benthic organisms. The estuarine waters provide important inshore habitat..." (Oceana).

While loggerheads have found the Delaware Bay a perfect spot for foraging, one female went so far as to lay her eggs on Delaware's Fenwick Island Beach. On a remarkable occasion, a female loggerhead chose Delaware as her nesting place and laid 78 eggs. "For the first time since 1973, a loggerhead sea turtle has successfully hatched eggs on one of Delaware's beaches. It's so

Chloe Long  
Dover High School  
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rare for sea turtles to nest in Delaware...” (Delaware Online). The fact this phenomenon occurred

is enough to show how special loggerhead sea turtles are to Delaware. The loggerhead is the only sea turtle species to have a documented nest not once, but twice in Delaware.

Some may argue one of the other three sea turtle species found in Delaware should be named sea turtle of the state as they have been seen in Delaware waters. However, the loggerhead is the most commonly found sea turtle in Delaware. The number of stranded loggerhead sea turtles found on Delaware beaches in the last four years is 137, which is almost five times more than all other three species combined, according to the MERR Institute. With assumed population rates much higher for loggerheads compared to other species in this area, it only makes sense for the loggerhead sea turtle to be honored by the state.

In conclusion, there are many reasons why the loggerhead should be named the sea turtle of Delaware. The Delaware Bay has the perfect components for a loggerhead habitat, provides ideal food sources, and Delaware beaches have been lucky enough to successfully house not one, but two loggerhead nests. Moreover, loggerheads are the most commonly seen sea turtle in Delaware. Loggerheads are the perfect candidate for the Delaware sea turtle because they prove to be so fitting and significant to the area.

### References

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