

Loggerhead Sea Turtles



One of the larger species of sea turtles, this species ranges from 200-400 pounds (90 - 180 kg) and up to 4 feet in length (1.2 meters). They occur throughout temperate and tropical regions of the Pacific, Indian, and Atlantic Oceans. One of the most abundant of the sea turtle species found in the US, they are named for their large head and strong crushing jaw which enables them to eat hard-shelled prey such as crabs, conchs, and whelks.

Facts:

- Their scientific name is *Caretta caretta*
- One population of these turtles nests in Japan and migrates across the entire Pacific Ocean to the rich feeding grounds off the coast of Baja California Sur, Mexico, where they spend the next several years of their life foraging and maturing.
- The first marine creature tracked across an entire ocean was a loggerhead nicknamed "Adelita". She was tracked by a research team led by SEE Turtles co-founder Dr. Wallace J. Nichols.
- In the United States, 90% of their nests are laid in Florida, however in the last decade the number of nests in Florida has declined by 40%.
- They are listed as Endangered around the world by the IUCN Red List and Threatened in the US.



Distribution:

Loggerheads are found in every ocean around the world. Only the leatherbacks have a wider distribution. The largest concentration of nesting occurs on Masirah Island off the coast of Oman in the Middle East. In the Pacific, their main nesting grounds include Japan and Australia. In the Atlantic, the main concentration occurs in Florida. They are the most common sea turtle species in the Mediterranean, nesting on beaches in Greece and Turkey to Israel and Libya.

Major Threats:

Their biggest threat is incidental capture (also known as “bycatch”) in commercial fishing gear, including trawls, longlines, gillnets, and traps and pots. In the US trawl fishery, devices called TED’s, or Turtle Excluder Devices are required by law. These devices allow sea turtles to escape out of the nets, however in other parts of the world these devices are not regulated and they continue to be caught. Recent scientific studies co-authored by SEE Turtles co-founder Dr. Nichols have shown the waters off Baja California Sur, Mexico to have among the highest rates of turtle bycatch in the world. In some parts of the world, they are also consumed for their meat and eggs. Beachfront development is also a threat, particularly in the Mediterranean.

Did You Know?

- Masirah Island off the coast of Oman in the Middle East has the largest congregation of nesting in the world, with an estimated 30,000 nests laid per year.
- Loggerheads carry many organisms on their carapace (shell), like barnacles and crabs. Scientists have identified between 50-100 species of plant and invertebrate animals hitching a ride.
- Roughly 1,000 sea turtles, the majority loggerheads, were caught in longline fishing gear in the Gulf of Mexico from 2006 – 2008. This number is more than eight times the allowed limit, causing a temporary fishery closure for six months in May, 2009.



Links & Resources:

IUCN Red List: <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/3897>

Defenders of Wildlife Magazine:

http://www.defenders.org/newsroom/defenders_magazine/winter_2009_for_the_love_of_loggerheads.php

Science Daily Article on loggerhead bycatch in Baja California, Mexico:

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/10/081014160507.htm>

State of the World’s Turtles Distribution Map: <http://seaturtlestatus.org/learn/maps/loggerhead>

The story of Adelita, a loggerhead who swam from Baja to Japan:

<http://www.seeturtles.org/1051/the-journey-of-adelita.html>



These materials are provided by SEE Turtles, a non-profit project that protects sea turtles through conservation travel. Visit our website, www.seeturtles.org for other fact sheets, school lesson plans, fundraising ideas, presentations, and field trips. Contact us at info@seeturtles.org for more information.