



REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

GREEN SEA TURTLE

ABOUT

The Green Sea Turtle (*Chelonia Mydas*) is the largest of all the hard-shelled sea turtles, growing to more than 3 ft (0.91m) long. Like all reptiles, Green Sea Turtles are cold-blooded. They evolved a bony outer shell which covers both the dorsal (back) and ventral (belly) surfaces with a highly developed protective armor. Sea turtles have the perfect body structure for life in the ocean. They can reach a speed of 35 mph, and their flippers make them graceful, efficient swimmers. Green Sea Turtles are herbivores named for the color of their body fat, which derives from their diet of algae and sea grasses. However, when young they are carnivorous, eating jellyfish and other invertebrates. Scientists estimate that this species reaches sexual maturity between 20 and 50 years old. When mature, Green Sea Turtle gender can be determined by their tails: males' tails are long and thick, whilst females have short, stubby ones. Females return to the beach where they were born every 2-4 years to lay eggs. Nesting season varies depending on the region. In the southeastern US, females generally nest between June and September and lay an average of five clutches (averaging 135 eggs per nest), which take 2 months to hatch. Only a few hatchlings from each nest survive into adulthood.

DID YOU KNOW?

Green Sea Turtles primarily use three types of habitat: oceanic beaches (for nesting), convergence zones in the open ocean, and benthic (flora and fauna on the sea bottom) feeding grounds in coastal areas. In US Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico waters, they are found in inshore and near shore waters from Texas to Massachusetts. In a 2004 Green Turtle assessment, this marine reptile was classified as endangered globally. The main cause of the historical, worldwide decline of the Green Turtle is the long-term harvest of eggs and adults on nesting beaches, and juveniles and adults from feeding grounds. Poachers continue to kill hundreds of sea turtles each year for their eggs, shells, and meat, despite laws prohibiting these activities in many countries. Egg clutches are especially easy to spot. After laying her eggs, the female turtle struggles back to the ocean, leaving a distinctive trail in the sand. Another serious threat to its survival is their incidental capture (by-catch) in many types of commercial fishing gear. Presently it is estimated that 200 - 1100 females nest annually along the central and southeast coast of Florida.

For more detailed information visit: www.earthtrust.org or www.nmfs.noaa.gov.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

What do adult Green Sea Turtles eat?

- a) Shrimp
- b) Algae and seagrasses
- c) Jellyfish and crabs
- d) Coral

Answer is B.

