



REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

HAWKSBILL SEA TURTLE

ABOUT

The Hawksbill Sea Turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricate*) is a small to medium-sized animal and is the only sea turtle with overlapping shell scales, with two pairs of plates between the eyes. The adult turtle's curved shell is amber with streaks of red-brown, black-brown, or yellow. The underside is whitish-yellow and sometimes has black spots. Adult females range from 24-38 inches (61-96 cm) in length and weigh between 60-190 pounds (27-86 kg). The life span of this species remains unknown.

Hawksbills are omnivorous (eating both meat and vegetation), feeding mostly on algae, sea grasses, soft corals, crustaceans, mollusks, sponges, jellyfish, and sea urchins. The head tapers to a sharp point with a beak-like mouth, hence its name. Hawksbill Turtles have the longest nesting season of all sea turtles -- 6 months -- occurring between July and October. Females are very faithful to specific nesting beaches and return season after season. They emerge from the water, select a site, and fill a pit they dig full of eggs, disguising the nest before returning to the sea. The whole nesting ritual takes one to three hours. The number of eggs laid (about 140) depends on the size of the female's shell, and the eggs take about 60 days to hatch.

DID YOU KNOW?

Hawksbills are found all over the world and are listed as endangered throughout their range. Threats to this animal include over-exploitation of the meat and eggs. Various parts of the body are also used for leather, oil, perfume, and cosmetics. The shell is highly prized for medicinal purposes, particularly in Asia, and is still used for tortoiseshell jewelry where it is not banned. In Singapore and the Philippines alone, 32,000-105,000 stuffed Hawksbills are sold annually. Severe declines in numbers have been noted in the western Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean region, and it is thought that nesting levels may be far lower than previously estimated. In response to sea turtle deaths in trawl nets, the National Marine Fisheries Service has issued regulations requiring shrimp trawlers on the southeastern and gulf coasts of the US to use turtle excluder devices (TEDs) on their nets. This allows turtles and other large marine life to escape should they enter a net.

For more detailed information visit: www.dec.ny.us or www.turtles.org.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

What is the shell of the Hawksbill highly prized for?

- a) Making turtle soup
- b) Collecting rainwater
- c) Use as bathroom accessories
- d) Medicinal purposes and jewelry

Answer is D.

