

Loggerhead Sea Turtle



Loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*)
Photo: NOAA



Photo: Michael White



Female digging her nest on Alabama's Gulf coast.
Photo: Brian Webb

Loggerhead eggs seen in the "clutch"
Photo: Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge



Sea Turtle tracks
Photo: Bon Secour Wildlife Refuge

Loggerhead Sea Turtle (*Caretta caretta*)

Facts

***There are seven species of marine turtles and all of them are listed under the Endangered Species Act.** Loggerhead turtles may be found worldwide in tropical, subtropical, and temperate seas. Juveniles and adults feed mostly on the sea bottom eating clams, crabs, shrimps, sea urchins, sponges, fishes, squids, and octopuses. During migration through the open sea, Loggerheads eat jellyfish, squid, flying fish and other aquatic species. They can grow to about 3 feet long and adults can weigh 170-400 lbs.

*Loggerheads are capable of living in a variety of environments, such as in brackish waters of bays, creeks, salt marshes and river mouths. During the winter they migrate to warmer waters in the southern Gulf of Mexico and, more rarely, to the Atlantic coast. The major nesting beaches are located in the southeastern United States, primarily along the Atlantic coast of Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. Loggerheads represent nearly all nests, or “clutches” in Alabama each season (50-70 clutches) and are common in the Gulf throughout much of the year. **They live at least 30 years and up to 50 years or more.**

***Females return to lay their eggs on or near the same beach where they hatched.** Unlike other sea turtles, courtship and mating usually do not take place near the nesting beach, but rather along the migration routes. **Females may nest several times during the breeding season, which is May 1– Oct. 31 here on Alabama’s Gulf coast.** She may lay as many as 190 soft, round white eggs per nest or “clutch”. The eggs incubate in the sand for 55 to 75 days. Most hatchlings emerge together in an “eruption” of babies from the nest mostly at night. After the majority of the hatchlings appear at the surface of the nest, they start a frenzied race toward the surf and out to sea. **Lights from buildings along the shore confuse the baby sea turtles, drawing them away from the water. Researchers have also noted that artificial lighting deters females from coming up on the beach and nesting.** Hatchlings weigh approximately one to two ounces and are preyed upon by mammals, sea birds, crabs and carnivorous fishes. Sharks are a formidable predator throughout the life cycle of sea turtles, although larger turtles can often avoid a shark attack by presenting the flat side of their shell to prevent biting.

*Until the 1970's, Loggerhead turtles were commercially harvested for their meat, eggs, leather, and fat. Today loggerheads, along with Kemp's ridley sea turtles, are more likely to be caught in large shrimp trawl nets and drown. Regulations requiring the use of Turtle Excluder Devices (TED's) in the nets pulled by shrimp boats have helped reduce mortality from net entanglement by allowing many turtles to escape from the nets.

*Sea turtle populations are in decline around the world. Many species are listed as either endangered or threatened by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Increased human use and development have added to the natural threats, such as storms and predators, these fascinating reptiles encounter.

How you can help keep our environment healthy

***Avoid using flashlights and flash photography on the beach at night. *Turn off outside lights and shield indoor lights from shining onto the beach at night.**

***Do not disturb sea turtle nests.**

***Leave sea turtle tracks undisturbed.**

***Do not leave trash, beach chairs, tents or coolers on the beach.**



Some of the material in this publication was adapted from original work by the Texas Fish & Wildlife Service and the Mobile Bay Estuary Program.

