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Sea Turtles

Sea turtles are one of Earth's most ancient creatures. They are marine reptiles which are found throughout most of the world's warm and temperate oceans. Some turtles travel between oceans, while others are only found in specific places.

Sea turtles' shells are perfectly designed for gliding through the sea. Unlike other turtles, sea turtles can't pull their head and legs back into their shell. Their colour varies from species to species, but they are most often yellow, green or black.



Prehistoric sea turtle
at the Museum
of Natural History NYC

There are currently seven species of sea turtles living in our seas, including the Flatback sea turtle, Green sea turtle, Hawksbill sea turtle, Kemp's Ridley sea turtle, Leatherback turtle, Loggerhead turtle and the Olive Ridley sea turtle. From reading the list you might think that there are a lot of turtles in our seas, but unfortunately all seven species are endangered, and some are critically endangered species.

Turtles face many threats to their survival from the moment they are born. After they hatch and as they make their way to the sea they are at risk from foxes, raccoons and seagulls. Even as adults, they are hunted by sharks, seals and whales in the sea. But probably their biggest threat of all is man. With so many predators to watch out for, it is no surprise that the turtle population is getting smaller.

We must work hard to try to conserve sea turtles. Not only are they beautiful and ancient creatures, but their survival helps maintain ecosystems in the ocean and on the coast.

Kemp's Ridley sea turtle: the rarest and smallest of the sea turtles



Green Turtle: named for the greenish color of its skin



Leatherback: the largest and most active of the sea turtles



Hawksbill sea turtle: named for its narrow head and hawk-like beak



The Loggerhead Turtle

The loggerhead sea turtle, also known as *Caretta caretta*, is probably the most well-known species of sea turtle. They get their name for their large head. Loggerhead turtles first appeared around forty million years ago and belong to the ancient turtle superfamily called Cheloniidae. Loggerhead turtles are the world's largest hard-shelled turtle. The largest one on record weighed a massive 545 kilos!



Word Bank & Activities pp. 24-25 ▶