

Sea Turtle

Sea turtles are a group of turtles that are adapted to living in the ocean. They live in every ocean except the Arctic Ocean. There are only seven living species of sea turtles and all of them are endangered species. The seven species are: flatback sea turtles, green sea turtles, hawksbill sea turtles, Kemp's ridley sea turtles, leatherback sea turtles, loggerhead sea turtles, and olive ridley sea turtles. The leatherback sea turtles are the only species that has bony plates under its leathery skin instead of a shell. Leatherback sea turtles are the largest and can be six to seven feet long, three to five feet wide, and up to 1,300 pounds. Other species of sea turtles are only two to four feet in length.

Sea turtle shells and necks are often homes for barnacles. The sea turtle is always swimming, which provides a constant flow of water and food source for the barnacles. Turtles also live very long lives, 80 years is the average life expectancy, and some leatherbacks live to be 100. Barnacles usually only live five to ten years, so they can be sure their sea turtle **host** will be there.

Female sea turtles lay their eggs in holes they dig in the sand at night. They do not stay with their eggs, and the babies have to find their way back to the ocean when they hatch. The gender of sea turtles depends on

the temperature of the sand where they **incubate**. Warmer sand causes faster incubation times, causing more females to hatch. Male sea turtles do not return to the land once they have gone back into the ocean.

Sea turtles spend most of their time underwater. They breathe air, but can use anaerobic metabolism if they need to stay underwater longer. Sea turtles can take one huge, fast breath to fill their lungs. When they need to come up for air, they can do so quickly and stay away from danger.

Sea turtles eat both animals and plants. They are important to the sea environment because some eat jellyfish and help control the jellyfish population. Green sea turtles also are some of the only animals to eat sea grass, which needs to constantly be cut to help it grow. Many other sea creatures depend on the sea grass as a place to live. If sea turtles went extinct, they would not be the only creatures affected.

Fisherman's nets are one of the biggest threats to sea turtles. Some shrimp nets now include **TEDs** or "Turtle Excluder Devices." These are metal bars that keep larger animals from being able to go into the back of the nets. There are then holes for the turtles to escape to the front of the net. It is one way humans are working to save the sea turtles from extinction.

1. **New terms:** See how these three terms are used in the text, and write a definition next to each one.

host

incubate

TEDs

2. How big can leatherback sea turtles get? _____

3. Sea turtles lay their eggs in sea grass.

True or False?

4. All sea turtles are endangered.

True or False?