

Threatened!

Loggerhead sea turtles glide gently through many of the world's oceans. They are known for their beauty and graceful nature. Once widely hunted, they continue to face threats both in the water and on land.

Largest of the hard-shelled turtles, adult male loggerheads usually weigh about 250 pounds. They are not as big as soft-shelled leatherback turtles though. Leatherback turtles can weigh over 1,000 pounds.

With wide heads and very powerful jaws, the loggerhead's strong jaws help them crush and eat shellfish. They eat clams, crabs, and sea urchins. They also eat jellyfish, squid, and fish.

Loggerhead turtles live in the Pacific Ocean, the Atlantic Ocean, the Indian Ocean, and the Mediterranean Sea. They inhabit both deep ocean waters and shallow coastal waters. They travel long distances between their ocean feeding areas and their nesting beaches. Pacific loggerhead turtles migrate from Japan all the way to the coast of Mexico. They travel over 7,500 miles in the ocean.

Although they spend most of their life at sea, loggerheads build their nests on beaches. Female turtles lay three to five nests of eggs during a nesting season. These nests are called clutches. Each nest contains 100 to 120 turtle eggs. The eggs incubate in the nests for two months before they hatch.

Loggerhead hatchlings are very small. They measure about 2 inches in length. The hatchlings usually emerge from their nests at night when the sand is cool. They make their way to the ocean by following the light of the moon and stars reflected in the water. The baby turtles then live for months eating and floating in large masses of seaweed.

Loggerhead turtles face a number of threats in their ocean environment. Ocean pollution can be very harmful to the turtles. Plastic bags are sometimes dumped into the ocean. Loggerheads mistake the floating bags for jellyfish and eat them. This makes them very sick. Loggerhead turtles also get trapped in fishing lines and fishing nets.

Their hatchlings and eggs also face threats on land. Predators like raccoons and snakes eat turtle eggs and hatchlings. Destruction of their beach nesting areas also puts them at risk. Because of the many dangers they face, loggerhead turtles are considered a vulnerable species.

People around the world are working hard to protect them. Volunteers help keep predators away from turtle nesting areas. They also help reduce ocean pollution. Conservation organizations work closely with fishermen to use turtle excluder devices (TEDs) on their nets. These devices make sure that loggerhead turtles do not get trapped in nets. Scientists estimate that there are between 40,000 and 50,000 nesting female loggerhead turtles worldwide.

Questions

1. What does *migrate* mean?
2. What does *incubate* mean?
3. How do loggerhead turtle hatchlings find the ocean?
4. What is one thing you could do to help protect loggerhead turtles?