

What Can You Do?

- Adhere to the fisheries laws and regulations regarding sea turtles.
- Avoid direct contact with sea turtles at sea or on land. Do not disturb turtles in feeding or nesting areas; shine lights on nesting turtles; or ride turtles while on land.
- Protect feeding areas. Do not discard plastic or waste at sea. Do not anchor on coral reefs or sea grass beds, or touch living coral when diving.



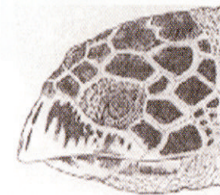
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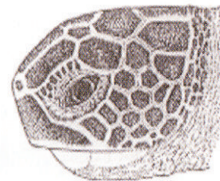
MARINE TURTLES OF THE BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS



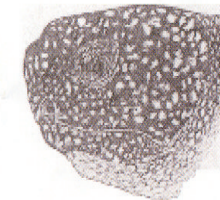
LOGGERHEAD



HAWKSBILL



GREEN



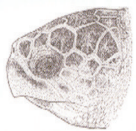
LEATHERBACK

Introduction

Sea turtles are gentle reptiles, which have adapted to life in the ocean. The stout, scaly legs of their cousins, the tortoises, have been transformed into slender, powerful flippers. The bony shell, which protects the turtle from predators, has been reduced somewhat in order to make sea turtles more buoyant and maneuverable in their watery home.

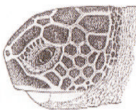
Sea turtles have lungs, so while they are at home in the ocean, they must come to the surface regularly to breathe air. The only time the turtle leaves the sea is to lay eggs. This important event involves a migration of thousand of miles because feeding and nesting grounds are often widely separated.

A female may deposit several clutches of eggs during the breeding season, leaving each to incubate in the warm sand of a tropical beach. When the baby turtles hatch, they struggle free from the deep nest hole and head to the sea. This timeless cycle began in the Age of the Dinosaurs and continues to this day. There are seven species of sea turtle and the following four are found in the British Virgin Islands.



Loggerhead
(*Caretta caretta*)

This turtle is rarely seen in the BVI. The name of this species was derived from its large head, which can grow up to 25 cm wide. Large, muscular jaws are ideal for crushing prey such as heavy-shelled clams, conch, sea urchin, crabs and jellyfish. Loggerheads are reddish-brown in colour. The shell is very thick, especially towards the back, which may serve as protection from sharks. They can grow up to one meter in length and weigh up to 180 kg. This species can dive to 230 meters or more, staying submerged for more than 30 minutes. Loggerheads reach sexual maturity between 20 and 30 years of age and reproduce for about 30 years.



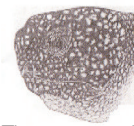
Green Turtle
(*Chelonia mydas*)

This species name refers to the colour of the fat found under its shell. Turtle soup is made from this fat. The coloration of the shell ranges from a light to dark brown. The carapaces often have dark brown blotches or radiating streaks. One unique characteristic of adult green turtles is that they are herbivores. Their diet consists of seaweed and sea grass. As a result of its diet, the turtles' internal tissues absorb the pigments from the plants. It is amazing to know that as hatchlings they are carnivores. Green turtles grow to an average of one meter in length and can weigh up to 230 kg.



Hawksbill
(*Eretmochelys imbricata*)

Their common name refers to their birdlike beak. This is used to catch prey in small crevices. This species resides in coral reefs. Their shell is basically brown in colour and depicts an exquisite pattern. The beautiful shell of this turtle is prized for its use in jewelry and ornaments. Hawksbill turtles are now endangered because for centuries they have been captured and killed for their shell. They are mostly carnivores and their diet consists of jellyfish, sea grasses, algae, soft coral, crustaceans and sponges. The hawksbill turtle is one of the smaller species of the marine turtles. This species grows up to 90 cm and weighs an average of 50 kg.



Leatherback
(*Dermochelys coriacea*)

The name of this turtle has English origins and it refers to the turtle's unique carapace. Other marine turtles have rigid shells comprised of a few large flattened bones covered in large horny scales. The leatherback's carapace consists of thousands of star-shaped bones, with a rubbery covering. Seven prominent ridges are located on the carapace. This particular species grows up to 3m in length and weighs about 600 kg. Leatherbacks feed exclusively on jellyfish. In the BVI the Leatherbacks are locally known as Trunks, for which a few of the beaches are named, for example Trunk Bay in Tortola and Valley Trunk Bay in Virgin Gorda.

Turtle Regulations of the BVI

- The annual closed season is from April 1st to November 30th.
- During the closed season, it is illegal to fish for, remove from the fishery waters, possess, sell or purchase any turtle, unless otherwise stated by notice published in the Gazette or any locally circulated newspaper, authorized by the Minister.
- It is illegal to capture any species of turtle on any beach.
- The possession, purchase or sale of turtle eggs is prohibited.
- It is illegal to take, possess or capture any Loggerhead turtle, Green turtle over the size of 24 inches, and Hawksbill turtle over the size of 15 inches.
- Measurement should be made from the front edge of the neck scales proceeding along the middle of the back to the end of the shell.

If these gentle creatures are to survive, people must respect them in their habitat and also become aware of behaviours and activities, which could harm them.



LOGGERHEAD



HAWKSBILL



GREEN



LEATHERBACK