



NOAA Fisheries  
Office of Protected Resources

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Sea Turtles

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Overview

Sea turtles, also called "marine turtles," are air-breathing reptiles with streamlined bodies and large flippers. They are well-adapted to life in the marine environment. They inhabit tropical and subtropical ocean waters throughout the world.

Of the 7 species of sea turtles, 6 are found in U.S. waters: green, hawksbill, Kemp's ridley, leatherback, loggerhead, and olive ridley. The 7th species, the [flatback sea turtle](#), is found only in Australia.

Although sea turtles live most of their lives in the ocean, adult females must return to beaches on land to lay their eggs. They often migrate long distances between foraging grounds and nesting beaches.

Status of Sea Turtles

All sea turtles occurring in U.S. waters are listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and are under the joint jurisdiction of NOAA Fisheries and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. They are also listed in [CITES Appendix I](#).

Green turtles and olive ridley turtles have breeding populations that were listed separately under the ESA, and therefore, have more than one ESA status.

(E = "endangered"; T = "threatened"; F = "foreign")

Species (16 listed "species") Status

- ▣ [green turtle](#) (2 listed populations\*)  
(*Chelonia mydas*)
  - Florida & Mexico's Pacific coast breeding colonies E
  - all other areas T
- ▣ [hawksbill turtle](#)  
(*Eretmochelys imbricata*) E
- ▣ [Kemp's ridley turtle](#)  
(*Lepidochelys kempi*) E
- ▣ [leatherback turtle](#)  
(*Dermochelys coriacea*) E
- ▣ [loggerhead turtle](#) (9 "DPS"s)  
(*Caretta caretta*)
  - Mediterranean Sea E (F)
  - North Indian Ocean E (F)
  - North Pacific Ocean E
  - Northeast Atlantic Ocean E (F)
  - Northwest Atlantic Ocean T
  - South Atlantic Ocean T (F)
  - South Pacific Ocean E (F)
  - Southeast Indo-Pacific Ocean T (F)
  - Southwest Indian Ocean T (F)
- ▣ [olive ridley turtle](#) (2 listed populations\*)  
(*Lepidochelys olivacea*)

*"For most of the wild things on Earth, the future must depend upon the conscience of mankind."*

- Dr. Archie Carr, father of modern marine turtle biology and conservation

What's New?

- ▣ [NMFS Initiates 5-year reviews of four sea turtles \(Kemp's ridley, olive ridley, leatherback, and hawksbill\), submit information through 12/10/2012](#)
- ▣ [90-day finding on petition to delist Hawaiian green turtle population](#)
- ▣ [12-month finding on petition to revise leatherback critical habitat in Puerto Rico](#)
- ▣ [Proposal to withdraw the alternative tow time restriction and require turtle excluder devices \(TEDs\) for all skimmer trawls, pusher-head trawls, and wing nets \(butterfly trawls\)](#)
- ▣ [Additional critical habitat for leatherback sea turtles along the U.S. West Coast](#)
- ▣ [2012 Annual Determination for Sea Turtle Observer Requirement](#)
- ▣ [Permit application from North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries to incidentally take sea turtles in inshore gillnet fisheries \(pdf\)](#)
- ▣ [Increase in Sea Turtle Strandings in the Gulf of Mexico](#)



Green Turtle  
(*Chelonia mydas*)  
Photo: Andy Bruckner, NOAA

After the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill