



Sea turtles have lived in the world's oceans for more than 150 million years. Sadly these ancient reptiles are now globally threatened with extinction. Many populations are declining as a result of persistent hunting, increasing coastal development, incidental capture in fisheries, the degradation and destruction of nesting beaches, and marine pollution. You can help to protect them by following these simple guidelines.



Developed in collaboration with the Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network (WIDECAST), these guidelines are intended to give general advice only – be sure to find out about local rules and regulations.



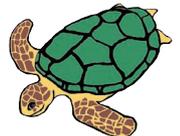
TURTLE FACTS

- All species of sea turtle are endangered and need our protection
- Turtles breathe air just like us, which means they can drown if they are prevented from reaching the surface of the sea
- Litter is dangerous, especially plastic bags which can be mistaken for jellyfish – a favourite turtle food
- Turtles remain in the same area for years and, as adults, return to the same nesting area year after year – if a nesting colony is destroyed, the turtles may never return



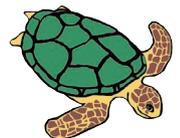
WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Support local sea turtle conservation initiatives – consider volunteering!
- Participate in local sighting networks and complete all sighting forms
- Do not buy or sell sea turtle products – turtles are strictly protected under CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) and most national laws



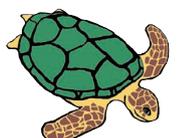
ON THE WATER

- Keep a good look out for sea turtles while boating – boat strikes can kill
- When in the water, keep your distance and avoid startling turtles; avoid disturbing resting, sleeping or actively feeding turtles
- To ensure that encounters are as unthreatening as possible, approach turtles slowly and calmly and move away if the turtle shows signs of distress
- Never try to spear, harass, catch or ride turtles
- Experts advise not to touch or feed wild turtles
- Take all litter home with you: trash can kill, especially when it is mistaken for food



Participating in turtle watching programmes actually helps to protect turtles by raising awareness about them

Be sure to find out about local laws and regulations, as they may differ from these general guidelines





ON THE BEACH

During breeding seasons, some special considerations apply to turtle nesting beaches.

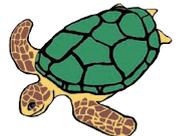
- Avoid damage to incubating nests – for example, avoid driving on a turtle nesting beach or using these beaches for camp fires or barbecues
- Do not leave large items (such as chairs, umbrellas or recreational vehicles) on nesting beaches at night – these can obstruct a turtle’s path and prevent egg-laying
- Keep pets, especially dogs, away as they can endanger eggs and hatchlings
- Keep beach lighting to a minimum – artificial lighting disorients turtles
- Shield or switch off lighting which is visible from the beach



Watching nesting turtles

Seeing an adult turtle come on shore to lay her eggs is an unforgettable experience. However, on land turtles are very vulnerable and if startled, a female turtle may return to the sea before her eggs can be successfully laid. Please follow these simple rules when watching nesting turtles.

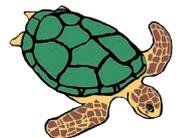
- Keep disturbance to a minimum – stay quiet and move around slowly
- Do not approach turtles as they arrive from the sea: they are easily frightened off
- Turtles that have not yet laid their eggs must be left alone
- Make minimal use of flashlights; never shine lights directly into a turtle’s face
- Try not to “trap” turtles – approach them from behind and keep low to the ground
- Move away if the turtle shows signs of distress
- Turtle eggs and hatchlings should be left undisturbed
- Consider limiting viewing to 30 minutes at a time



Photography

Flash photography of nesting turtles is a controversial topic. In some places this constitutes harassment and is illegal. If using a camera flash, do so sparingly and:

- Never take photographs before a turtle has laid her eggs
- Only take photographs from behind the turtle – the flash will temporarily “blind” her and complicate her return to the sea



Hatchling turtles

- Try to shield hatchlings if they appear disoriented by beachfront lighting – place yourself between the hatchlings and the light source, and ask that the lights be turned off long enough for the hatchlings to reach the sea
- Do not interfere with their crawl to the sea as this could jeopardize their survival
- Never photograph hatchlings – they are very sensitive to light

