

Sea Turtles

Sea turtles are reptiles that live in the warm water oceans. They are cold blooded and can not survive in ocean water that is too cold. Sea turtles migrate to warmer waters when the temperature of the water drops.

Sea Turtles still need to breathe air, so they swim to the surface often to reach the air. But they can hold their breath for up to 5 hours if they need to by slowing down their heart rate.

Sea turtles are much bigger than land turtles and freshwater turtles. Some sea turtles are over 4 feet long and weigh over 600 pounds. They can live 30 to 80 years old. Sea turtles have been on Earth for over 110 million years. They swam the oceans when dinosaurs walked on land!

Sea turtles have flippers instead of legs. They use their front flippers to paddle through the ocean. Their back flippers are used for steering and stopping. They can't pull their flippers inside their shell like land turtles can, so they are more vulnerable to predators when they are swimming or nesting.

Every year female sea turtles swim back to the beach where they were born. They wait until night and then climb onto the beach to dig nests and lay around one hundred eggs. After laying their eggs, they cover them with sand and head back to the sea. About 2 months later, the baby turtles will hatch. When the baby turtles hatch they are only 1 ½ to 4 inches long.

Predators of eggs and hatchlings include dogs, cats, raccoons, feral hogs, fire ants, and ghost crabs. These animals may dig up a sea turtle nest to get to the eggs, even if the nest is 2 feet below the surface of the sand.

Once hatchlings emerge from the egg, they need to get to the water. Then birds become an additional threat. Once they get to the ocean, they might be eaten by sharks, whales or other large fish. Not a lot of baby turtles make it to adulthood, about 1 in a thousand. They are considered an adult when they are about 25 years old.

There are 7 different types of sea turtles around the world, but they all have sharp jaws to tear apart their food. Favorite foods for sea turtles are sea grass, crabs, shrimp, and jellyfish. Plastic looks like jellyfish when it's floating in the water and that's why so many turtles die from ingesting plastic—they were going for a tasty snack. That's why humans are the largest predator of adult turtles. We kill them through poaching, fishing gear entanglement, pollution, marine debris like plastic, and climate change. Most sea turtle species are endangered.

June 16 is World Sea Turtle Day. See the video at

https://youtu.be/LcHPoH4TM_k