

Sea Turtle Identification

These marine reptiles are characterized by a large, streamlined shell (carapace), and non-retractable head and flippers. In all species except the leatherback, the body is covered with hard, keratinized plates called “scutes”. The number and arrangement of scutes on the carapace and head are used to identify between the species.

Sea turtles range in color from pale green to almost black.

Jaw shape also varies among species, adapted to its diet.

There is no sexual dimorphism (physical differences between males and females) with the only difference in adult turtles being the size of tail. Adult males have a much wider and longer tail than females.

Leatherback

Scientific name: *Dermochelys Coriacea*

- ✚ The largest sea turtle
- ✚ 4-8 feet in length (1.2-2.4 meters)
- ✚ Smooth, leathery, flexible carapace (shell)
- ✚ No Scutes (scales)
- ✚ Black in color with white, pink, and grayish spots
- ✚ Longitudinal ridges running the length of the carapace
- ✚ 500-2000 pounds (225-900 kg)

Green

Scientific name: *Chelonia Mydas*

- ✚ Largest of the hard-shelled sea turtles
- ✚ Up to 4 feet (1.2 meters) in length
- ✚ Carapace color ranges from olive brown to almost black
- ✚ 4 pairs of coastal scutes
- ✚ A single pair of scales between the eyes (prefrontal scutes)
- ✚ Scutes do not overlap
- ✚ “Sunburst” pattern on scutes
- ✚ Up to 500 pounds (225 kg)

Loggerhead

Scientific name: *Caretta Caretta*

- ✚ Up to 4 feet (1.2 meters) in length
- ✚ Named for its massive head/jaws
- ✚ Carapace (shell) is reddish-brown in color
- ✚ 5 pairs of costal scutes
- ✚ 2 pairs of prefrontal scutes
- ✚ carapace in slightly heart-shaped
- ✚ skin and plastron (belly) yellow in color
- ✚ Scutes (scales) do not overlap



- ✚ 200-400 pounds (90-180 kg)

Hawksbill

Scientific name: *Eretmochelys Imbricata*

- ✚ 2-3 feet (.5-1 meter) in length
- ✚ One of the smaller species
- ✚ Overlapping scutes (scales) on carapace (unique to this species)
- ✚ 4 pairs of costal scutes
- ✚ Named for its narrow head and bird like beak
- ✚ Brightly colored carapace (shell)
- ✚ 100-200 pounds (45-90 kg)



Olive Ridley

Scientific name: *Lepidochelys Olivacea*

- ✚ Named for its pale green carapace (shell)
- ✚ 2 to 2.5 feet (~.6 meters) in length
- ✚ Slightly hearty-shaped carapace
- ✚ 6 or more pairs of costal scutes
- ✚ 2 pairs of prefrontal scutes
- ✚ 75-100 pounds (34-45 kg)
- ✚ The most abundant species



Kemp's Ridley

Scientific name: *Lepidochelys Kempii*

- ✚ The smallest species
- ✚ Up to 2 feet (.6 meters) in length
- ✚ Triangular shaped head and hooked beak
- ✚ 5 pairs of costal scutes
- ✚ 2 pairs of prefrontal scutes
- ✚ Olive-grey carapace (shell)
- ✚ Almost circular carapace is as wide, or wider as it is long
- ✚ The only species of sea turtle that nests primarily during the day
- ✚ 75-+100 pounds



Flat back

Scientific name: *Natator Depressus*

- ✚ Named for its flat carapace (shell)
- ✚ Up to 3 feet (.9 meters) in length
- ✚ Pale grayish-green carapace
- ✚ 4 pairs of costal scutes single pair of prefrontal scutes
- ✚ Edges of carapace are distinctly upturned
- ✚ Up to 200 pounds (90 kg)
- ✚ Only found in waters around northern Australia and southern Indonesia





Sea Turtle Fun Facts

- ✚ Turtles are reptiles.
- ✚ Turtles have a hard shell that protects them like a shield; this upper shell is called a 'carapace'.
- ✚ Turtles also have a lower shell called a 'plastron'.
- ✚ Turtles can hide their heads inside their shells when attacked by predators.
- ✚ Turtles have existed for around 215 million years.
- ✚ Like other reptiles, turtles are cold blooded.
- ✚ The largest turtle is the leatherback sea turtle; it can weigh over 900 kg! (2000 lb).
- ✚ Turtles lay eggs.
- ✚ In some species of turtle the temperature determines if the egg will develop into a male or female, lower temperatures lead to a male while higher temperatures lead to a female.
- ✚ Some turtles lay eggs in the sand and leave them to hatch on their own. The young turtles make their way to the top of the sand and scramble to the water while trying to avoid predators.
- ✚ Sea turtles have special glands which help remove salt from the water they drink.
- ✚ Turtles are notoriously slow movers (having a giant shell doesn't help!).
- ✚ Many turtle species are endangered.
- ✚ Kemp's Ridley is the smallest sea turtle at 30 inches long (.762m).
- ✚ Adult female and male sea turtles are the same size.
- ✚ Kemp's Ridley weighs between 80-100lbs (36-45 kg).
- ✚ Lifespan is Up to 80 years.

