



[OPR Home](#) | [About OPR](#) | [Species](#) | [Permits](#) | [Laws & Policies](#) | [Programs](#) | [Education](#) | [Publications](#)

**Species**

- ▣ **Marine Mammals**
  - ▣ Cetaceans
  - ▣ Pinnipeds
- ▣ **Marine Turtles**
- ▣ **Marine & Anadromous Fish**
- ▣ **Marine Invertebrates & Plants**
- ▣ **Species of Concern**
- ▣ **Threatened & Endangered Species**
  - ▣ Critical Habitat Maps

[Contact OPR](#)  
[Glossary](#)  
[OPR Site Map](#)

  


**Sea Turtles**

[Sea Turtle Species](#) | [Recovery Plans](#) | [Threats](#) | [Conservation & Management](#) | [Bycatch](#) | [Permits](#) | [Five-Year Reviews](#) | [Regulations](#) | [Symposia](#) | [Publications](#) | [Strategy for Conservation & Recovery](#) | [Photos](#) | [Satellite Tracking](#) | [More Info](#)

**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")

<b>Species</b> (16 listed <a href="#">"species"</a> )	<b>Status</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▣ <a href="#">green turtle</a> (2 listed populations*) (<i>Chelonia mydas</i>)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Florida &amp; Mexico's Pacific coast breeding colonies</li> <li>◦ all other areas</li> </ul> </li> <li>▣ <a href="#">hawksbill turtle</a> (<i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i>)</li> <li>▣ <a href="#">Kemp's ridley turtle</a> (<i>Lepidochelys kempii</i>)</li> <li>▣ <a href="#">leatherback turtle</a> (<i>Dermochelys coriacea</i>)</li> <li>▣ <a href="#">loggerhead turtle</a> (9 "DPS"s) (<i>Caretta caretta</i>)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Mediterranean Sea</li> <li>◦ North Indian Ocean</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>E</li> <li>T</li> <li>E</li> <li>E</li> <li>E (F)</li> <li>E (F)</li> </ul>

*"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?**

- ▣ [The Keratin Connection: A Breakthrough in Sea Turtle Research](#)
- ▣ [2013 Annual Determination for Sea Turtle Observer Requirement \(no additional fisheries identified\)](#)
- ▣ [NMFS initiates 5-year reviews of four sea turtles \(Kemp's ridley, olive ridley, leatherback, and hawksbill\)](#)
- ▣ [90-day finding on petition to delist Hawaiian green turtle population](#)
- ▣ [12-month finding on petition to revise leatherback critical habitat in Puerto Rico](#)
- ▣ [Decision to withdraw a proposed rule requiring TEDs in skimmer trawls, pusher-head trawls, and wing nets \(butterfly trawls\)](#)
- ▣ [Permit application from NC Division of Marine Fisheries to incidentally take sea turtles in inshore gillnet fisheries](#)
- ▣ [Increase in sea turtle strandings in the Gulf of Mexico \(2010-present\)](#)



- 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*)
  - Mexico's Pacific coast breeding colonies E
  - all other areas T

\*Note: These populations were listed before the 1978 ESA amendments that restricted population listings to "[distinct population segments](#)" of vertebrate species.

### Sea Turtle Conservation and Management

All six species of sea turtles occurring in the U.S. are protected under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. In 1977, NOAA Fisheries and the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service \(USFWS\)](#) signed a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) [pdf] to jointly administer the Endangered Species Act with respect to sea turtles. NOAA Fisheries has the lead responsibility for the conservation and recovery of sea turtles in the marine environment and USFWS has the lead for the conservation and recovery of sea turtles on nesting beaches.

### Threats

Major threats to sea turtles in the U.S. include, but are not limited to: destruction and alteration of nesting and foraging habitats; [incidental capture in commercial and recreational fisheries](#); entanglement in [marine debris](#); and vessel strikes. To reduce the incidental capture of sea turtles in commercial fisheries, NOAA Fisheries has enacted [regulations](#) to restrict certain U.S. commercial fishing gears (gillnets, longlines, pound nets, and trawls) that have known, significant bycatch of sea turtles. To effectively address all threats to sea turtles, NOAA Fisheries and the USFWS have developed [recovery plans](#) to direct research and management efforts for each sea turtle species. [More information on threats to sea turtles](#) is available.

### International Conservation

The conservation and recovery of sea turtles requires multi-lateral cooperation and agreements to ensure the survival of these highly migratory animals. NOAA Fisheries has a broad national and international program for the conservation and recovery of sea turtles. The Office of Protected Resources works closely with 2 international environmental agreements that deal exclusively with sea turtle conservation:

- [Indian Ocean - South-East Asian \(IOSEA\) Marine Turtle Memorandum of Understanding](#)
- [Inter-American Convention \(IAC\) for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles](#)

The goal of the international component of the sea turtle program is to facilitate the global conservation and recovery of sea turtles by working closely with other nations through diplomatic channels, capacity building, and scientific exchange. The Office of Protected Resources also coordinates closely with our [Regional Office](#) staff and [Science Center](#) staff who are involved in international activities related to sea turtle research and management.

### More Information

- [Sea Turtle Observer Requirement- Annual Determination](#)
- [NMFS Northeast Regional Office Sea Turtle Program](#)
- [NMFS Southeast Fisheries Science Center Sea Turtle Information](#)
- [NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center Marine Turtle Research Program](#)
- [NMFS Southwest Fisheries Science Center Marine Turtle Research Program](#)
- [More Sea Turtle Related Links](#)

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

### After the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill



Dr. Brian Stacy, NOAA veterinarian, cleans a young Kemp's ridley turtle  
Photo: NOAA/FWCC

• [Sea Turtles, Dolphins, and Whales and the Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill](#)

• [Natural Resource Damage Assessment \(NRDA\)](#)

*Updated: January 8, 2014*



[Home](#) | [About Us](#) | [Forms](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Information Quality](#) | [Disclaimer](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Feedback](#) | [Search](#)

