FACT SHEET LOGGERHEAD TURTLE

Scientific Name: ***Caretta caretta***
Common Names: **Loggerhead Turtle**
Class: **Reptilia**
Size: **Born at 40 mm reaching 120 cm and 160 kg**

Identification Features:
They are commonly called "loggerhead" sea turtles due to their overly large heads with a horny beak that is significantly thicker than in other sea turtles. The skin ranges from yellow to brown in colour and the shell is typically reddish-brown. Their front flippers possess two claws. There is no external difference between the male and female until they become adults, most obvious being the males have a thicker, longer tail. These turtles often have encrusting animals like barnacles on their backs.

Distribution:
They are found throughout the tropical and temperate littoral zones extending as far south as Cape Town in Africa. They are more common on the east coast than west coast. Their primary habitat is in the southeastern United States ranging southward to South America and extending eastward to Africa and the Mediterranean as well as areas of the western Pacific and Indian Oceans.

Habitat:
Loggerhead sea turtles spend most of their lives in the open ocean and in shallow coastal waters. They rarely come ashore, with the exception of the females' brief visits to construct nests and deposit eggs. Hatchling loggerhead turtles live in floating mats of Sargassum algae. Adults and juveniles live along the continental shelf. Loggerheads occupy waters with surface temperatures ranging from 13.3 to 28 °C during non-nesting season. Temperatures from 27 to 28 °C are most suitable for nesting females. Juvenile loggerheads share the Sargassum habitat with a variety of other organisms. The mats of *Sargassum* contain as many as 100 different species of animals on which the juveniles feed. Turtles can sleep for up to four hours under water and can swim underwater for 20 minutes on one breath.

Migrations:

These turtles range widely from their nesting areas. Tag returns from Maputaland have shown that one female executed a voyage of 2 640 km in just 66 days. That is an average daily swim of 40 km! Long distance recoveries indicate that the Maputaland beaches draw female Loggerheads from over 5 000 km of the African coast and from Madagascar.

Diet:

This species of turtle is completely carnivorous. The first 3 years of its life are spent at sea feeding on floating fauna such as blue bottles (Portuguese Man of War), storm snails like Janthina sp. and Pteropods. Thereafter it returns to the littoral zone and change their diet to echinoderms (sea urchins), molluscs and hermit crabs.

Nesting areas:

They nest normally in temperate zones using medium-grain silica sand beaches. Three major areas for nesting are Maputaland, Natal; Japan and the south east Atlantic Coast of the United States. Up to 500 females a year nest in Maputaland.

Reproduction:

Females mature between 12 and 15 years. Loggerheads lay an average of 500 eggs per season in batches of 100 to 120 at intervals of 12 and 13 days, depending on ambient sea temperatures. The eggs incubate for about 60 days depending on the ambient temperature. The sex of the hatchlings depends on the incubation temperature: below 24^0C will result in males and above 29^0C will result in females. Periods of absence from the nesting beaches vary from turtles laying eggs in consecutive seasons to those not returning in 16 years. They can nest at least 8 times in their lifetime, but their full reproductive lifetime is unknown. The eggs are highly fertile - 90%.

Status:

They are not widely used in the western world but still important to coastal people who eat them. Well protected here in KwaZulu-Natal, much less so in Mozambique and Madagascar. There are only 4 documented nesting grounds in the Indian Ocean; Maputaland, SE Madagascar, Oman and Burma. Maputaland is the only population that receives protection in the St Lucia and Maputaland Marine Reserves.

IUCN

Threats to the Loggerhead and other turtles' existence

- They drown on long line fishing hooks or in fishing nets
- They drown in bather protection nets (shark nets)
- People who disregard laws and drive on the beach could destroy nests and hatchlings
- People harvest the eggs or kill turtles for their meat. People also sell hawksbill shells or use it to make ornaments and craft items
- People sometimes kill turtles to use parts of the animal in the muti trade
- They die after colliding with boats or when boat propellers injure them
- They choke or their intestines get blocked from accidently eating plastic or fishing line that people have dumped into the sea. They often mistake plastic bags for sea jellies
- Tourism developments may destroy their nests and the beaches where they lay their eggs

Here is what you can do to save turtles

- Never disturb a turtle on the beach or a turtle nest and eggs
- Never buy any product made from turtle meat, shell or eggs
- Never discard any plastic, net or old fishing line on the beach or in the sea
- Pick up any plastic or pieces of fishing line or nets that you may find on the rocks
- Control dogs that may destroy turtle nests
- Ask boat owners to slow down and look out for turtles, especially in shallow waters
- Ask fishermen to save live turtles they may find on their hooks or in their nets by returning them to the sea as soon as possible
- Contact your local conservation agency or nearest aquarium if you find a stranded turtle that is still alive. They may be able to save it
- Tell your friends and family if you find a turtle, dead, with a tag on its front or hind flipper they should return the tag to Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife
- Encourage your friends and family to find out more about these amazing animals and how we can protect them

Did you know?

- Sea turtles can hold their breath whilst diving and can dive to depths of 900m
- They can swim as fast as 50 km/h
- The sand temperature determines the sex of the hatchings- Cool Boys and Hot Girls
- Only 1 to 2 of every 1 000 eggs will survive until adulthood
- They can live up to 100 years old
- Green Turtles get their name from the colour of their body fat or adipose