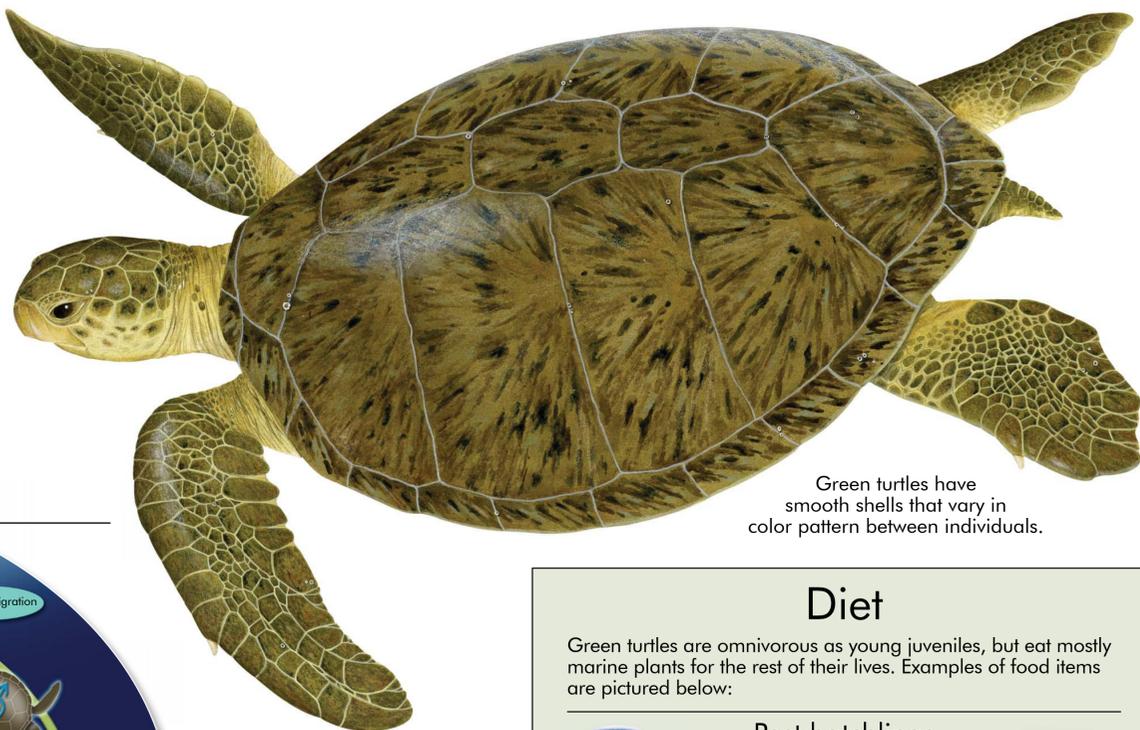


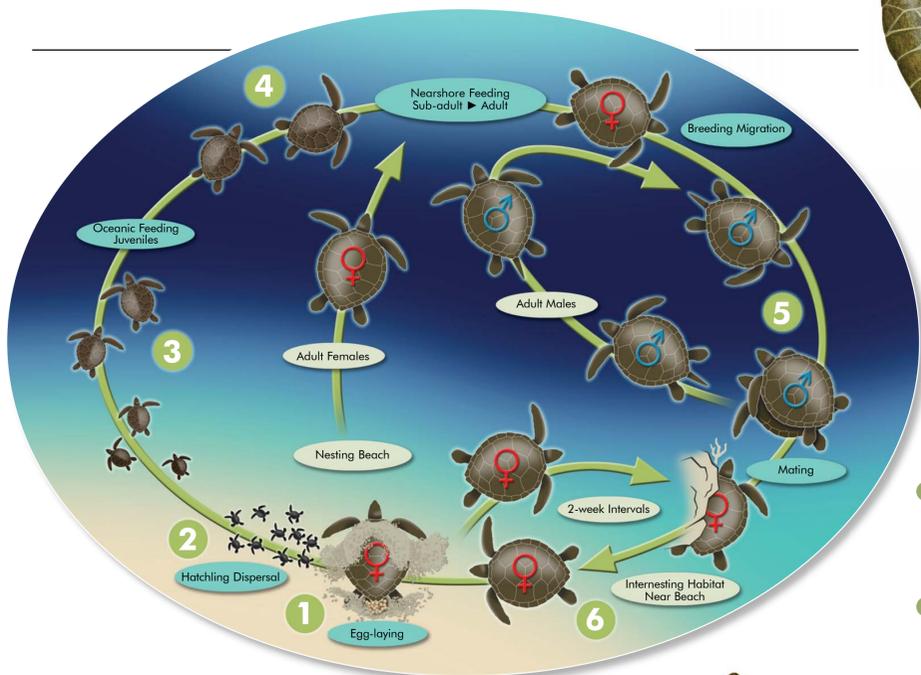
# GREEN TURTLE

*Chelonia mydas*

Extensive harvest for meat has caused severe declines in green turtle numbers, but their populations are recovering where they have been protected. The green turtle's name comes from the color of the fat lining the inside of their shell and reflects the turtle's historical use as food.



Green turtles have smooth shells that vary in color pattern between individuals.

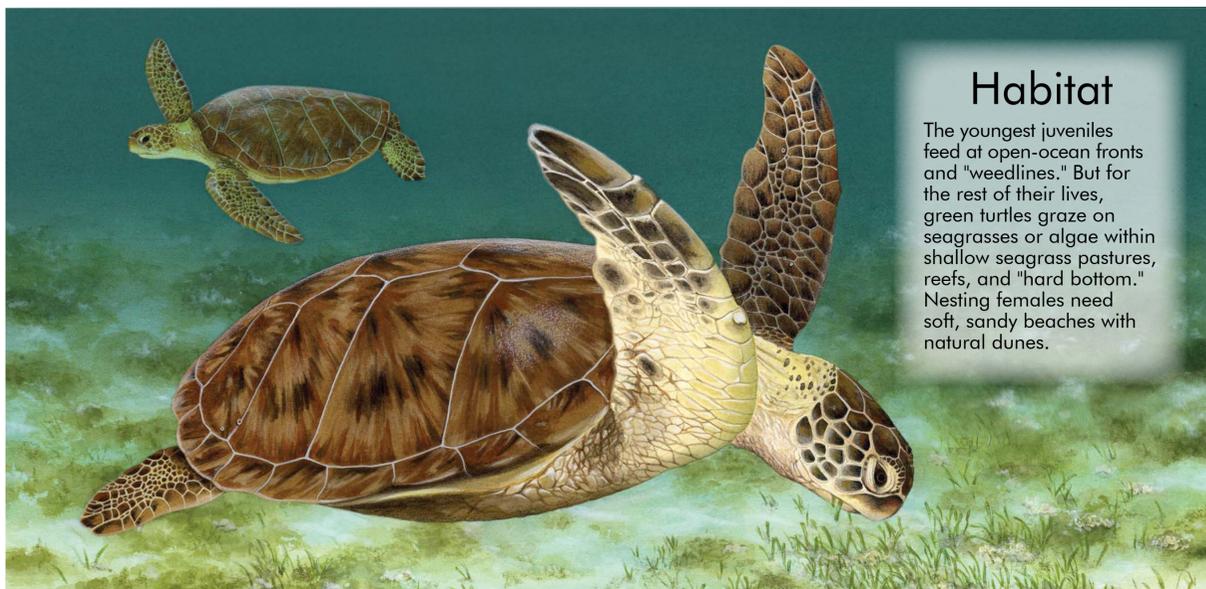


## Life Cycle

A green turtle may travel thousands of miles between many developmental habitats in the 2-4 decades it takes to mature.

- 1 Nests average 135 eggs which incubate under sand for 50-60 days. Warmer sands produce mostly female turtles and cooler sands result in mostly males.
- 2 A few days after they hatch, the hatchlings emerge together from the nest at night, scramble quickly to the sea, and are dispersed by ocean currents.
- 3 Juveniles live near the surface of deep ocean waters and are carried widely by currents.
- 4 At about three years of age, juveniles swim into nearshore waters and inhabit reefs and seagrass pastures. Sub-adults nearing maturity move into more tropical waters.
- 5 Adults mate along migration routes between foraging and nesting areas and immediately off the nesting beach.
- 6 About every 2 years, adult females migrate to the beach where they hatched and make about 4 nests at two-week intervals.

**Nesting/hatching season:** June–November  
**Adult shell length:** 33–45 in (83–114 cm)  
**Adult weight:** 240–420 lb (110–190 kg)  
**Age at maturity:** 20–40 years  
**Status:** Endangered in Florida



## Habitat

The youngest juveniles feed at open-ocean fronts and "weedlines." But for the rest of their lives, green turtles graze on seagrasses or algae within shallow seagrass pastures, reefs, and "hard bottom." Nesting females need soft, sandy beaches with natural dunes.

### Diet

Green turtles are omnivorous as young juveniles, but eat mostly marine plants for the rest of their lives. Examples of food items are pictured below:

**Post hatchlings**

- Jelly animals
- Copepods
- Dead insects
- Hydroids

**Juveniles and Adults**

- Seagrasses
- Red algae

### Natural Predators

Although eggs and small green turtles have many natural predators, large green turtles have few.

**Eggs and Hatchlings**

- Raccoon
- Ghost crab
- Sea birds

**Post Hatchlings**

- Predatory fish

**Juveniles and Adults**

- Large sharks

### Conservation

To manage artificial lighting near nesting beaches, coastal communities have adopted ordinances requiring lights to be hidden from the beach. These laws allow use of light by property owners while protecting turtles from light-induced disorientation.

## Nesting

Females take about an hour to dig a body pit and egg chamber, lay their eggs, and scatter sand to camouflage their nest.



## Tracks

Green turtle tracks have slash-like marks at the margin with a tail-drag mark down the center.



31 in (80 cm)

## Regional Distribution

Florida provides nesting beaches for the second largest green turtle population in the wider Caribbean. The youngest juveniles live in the open Gulf of Mexico and in deep ocean waters. Larger juveniles, sub-adults, and adults are found in shallow coastal waters.



- Oceanic juveniles
- Large juveniles, sub-adults, and adults
- Major nesting beaches
- Other important Florida nesting beaches

## Threats

**Light Pollution** (artificial sources visible from the beach) draws hatchlings off the beach where they are killed by predators and traffic.



Other important threats:

- Marine plastics are an ingestion hazard
- Illegal Harvest takes place range-wide
- Coastal Armoring prevents nesting
- Gill Nets capture and drown turtles
- Fishing Debris entangles and drowns turtles
- Boat Strikes kill and injure turtles

## How to Help

Although green turtles are international marine animals that need help throughout their range if they are to survive, there are many things we can do for them here at home. Make informed seafood choices, hide lights visible from beaches, pick up marine litter, observe nesting turtles only with a trained guide, contribute to marine conservation organizations, purchase a sea turtle license plate, and share your interest in sea turtles with others.



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