

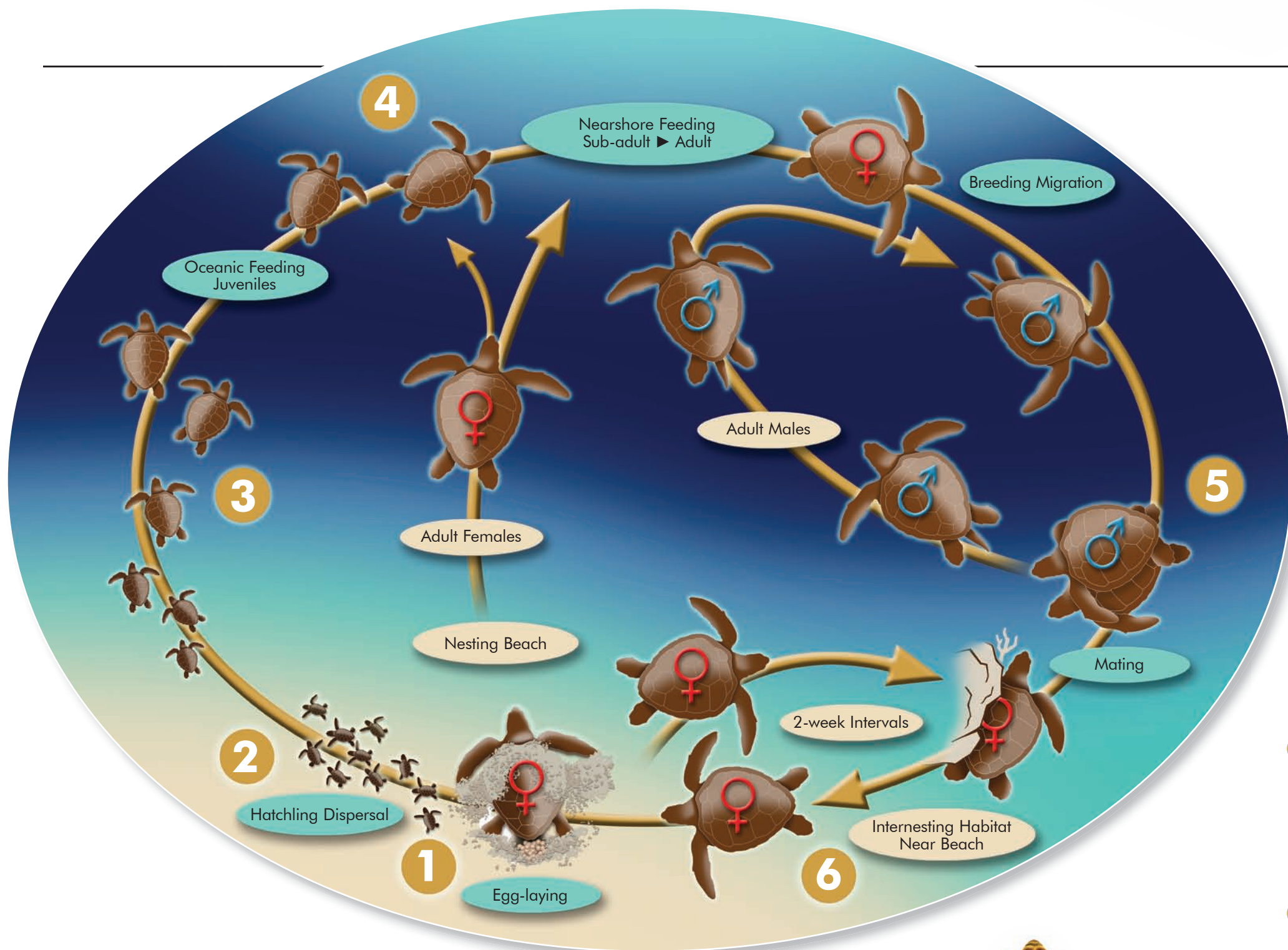
# LOGGERHEAD SEA TURTLE

*Caretta caretta*

Although it is Florida's most commonly observed sea turtle, the loggerhead is rare throughout most of the species' global range. They are found in marine waters from warm-temperate seas through the sub-tropics. Loggerheads are named for their overly proportioned head.



A loggerhead's shell is often covered with algae, large barnacles, and other varied animal tag alongs.



## Life Cycle

A loggerhead's journey through life spans tens of thousands of miles around entire oceans and results in a 6000-fold change in weight over several decades.

- 1 Nests average 115 eggs and 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 by ocean-spanning currents.
- 4 At sub-adult size, turtles swim into nearshore waters and inhabit reefs, lagoons, and bays. Sub-adults nearing maturity move into warmer subtropical waters.
- 5 Adults mate along migration routes between foraging and nesting areas.
- 6 Every 2–4 years, adult females migrate to regional beaches where they hatched and make about 3–6 nests at two-week intervals.

**Nesting/hatching season:** May–October  
**Adult shell length:** 31–43 in (80–110 cm)  
**Adult weight:** 155–375 lb (70–170 kg)  
**Age at maturity:** 30–35 years  
**Status:** Threatened



**Hatchling to Post-hatchling**  
 First year, 1–35 oz (20–1000 g)  
**Juvenile**  
 1–10 years old, 2–55 lb (1–25 kg)  
**Sub-adult**  
 10–30 years old, 55–200 lb (25–91 kg)  
**Adult**  
 to 60+ years old, average 260 lb (120 kg)

## Diet

Loggerheads eat a wide variety of animals and are one of the few predators of large hard-shelled invertebrates. Examples of food items are pictured below:

Jelly animals

Copepods

Sea slugs

Hydroids

Mollusks

Crabs

Sea pens

## Natural Predators

Although eggs and small loggerheads are eaten by many animals, large loggerheads have few natural predators.

### Eggs and Hatchlings

Raccoon

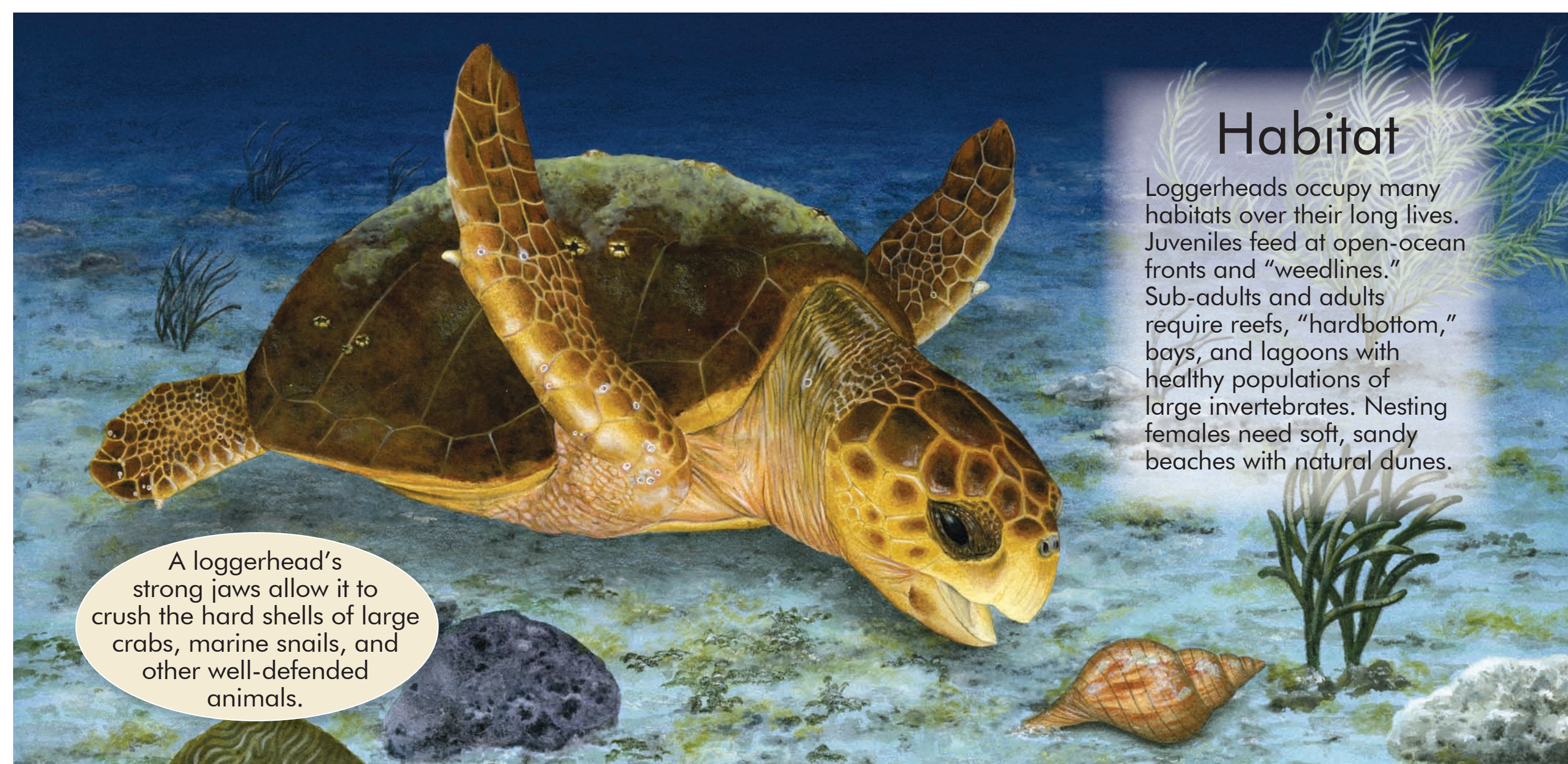
Fish crow

Ghost crab

### Post-hatchlings

Predatory fish

Large sharks



## Habitat

Loggerheads occupy many habitats over their long lives. Juveniles feed at open-ocean fronts and "weedlines." Sub-adults and adults require reefs, "hardbottom," bays, and lagoons with healthy populations of large invertebrates. Nesting females need soft, sandy beaches with natural dunes.

A loggerhead's strong jaws allow it to crush the hard shells of large crabs, marine snails, and other well-defended animals.

## Conservation

One important conservation effort has been the acquisition of coastal land for parks and refuges. These beach and dune systems provide sea turtle nesting habitat, protect other rare species, and are equally valuable as wild and scenic places for public visitation.



## 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

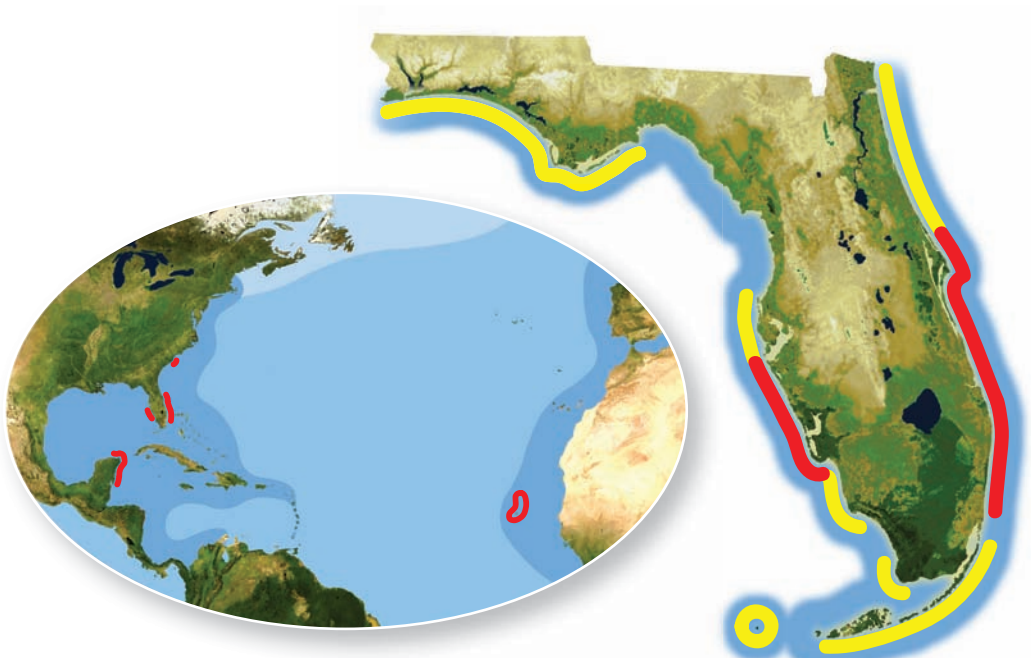
Alternating rear-flipper swirls are at the margin of a wavy track center with no tail-drag mark.



26 in (65 cm)

## Regional Distribution

Florida provides nesting beaches for the largest loggerhead population in the Western Hemisphere. Juveniles live in deep ocean waters. Larger sub-adults and adults tend to be coastal but may also feed in the open sea.



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

## Threats

**Coastal armoring** (seawalls, rock revetments, sandbags) and fences, and other barriers block access to upper beach nesting areas.



Other important threats:

- Marine plastics are an ingestion hazard
- Longline Fisheries hook and drown turtles
- Light Pollution misleads and kills hatchlings
- Trawler Fisheries capture and drown turtles
- Fishing Debris entangles and drowns turtles
- Boat Strikes kill and injure turtles

## How to Help

Although loggerheads 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.



**SEA TURTLE CONSERVANCY** Celebrating over 50 Years of Sea Turtle Conservation  
**Sea Turtle Conservancy**  
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Funded by The Sea Turtle Grants Program with proceeds from the sale of the Florida Sea Turtle License Plate. Learn more at [www.helpingseaturtles.org](http://www.helpingseaturtles.org).