

## ***Loggerhead Sea Turtle***

*Caretta caretta*

### **Physical Characteristics**

- Adult weighs from 200 to 350 lbs. (91–159 kg) and reaches 3 feet (91 cm) in length.
- Hatchling is about 2 inches (5 cm) long and weighs 0.85 ounces (24 gm).
- The carapace, or upper shell, of the loggerhead is reddish brown in color with a yellow underside. As the turtle ages, the carapace can become covered in algae and barnacles giving it a green to gray color. Its skin is cream to yellow in color.
- Unlike land turtles, a sea turtle is unable to tuck its head and legs into its shell, making it vulnerable to sharks, the turtle's only natural predator.

### **Range/Habitat**

- Found all over the world in the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans, as well as the Mediterranean Sea.
- Found in shallow coastal waters, muddy bottom bays.

### **Prey**

- Diet consists of bottom dwelling invertebrates such as mollusks, clams, whelks, crabs, oysters, shrimp, sponges and horseshoe crabs. Loggerheads may also scavenge for dead fish.
- Young turtles prey on jellyfish.
- Loggerhead sea turtles crush their food with powerful, toothless jaws.

### **Reproduction/Growth**

- During nesting season (May—October), the female emerges at night and crawls onto the beach to make a nest for her eggs. Once she reaches an area on the beach well above the high tide line or into the dune face, she digs a hole by scooping sand with her rear flippers. She then deposits ~100 eggs and covers them with sand, smoothing the sand out with her body to disguise its location from predators such as raccoons. When this is complete, she will return to the sea.
- Eggs incubate for approximately 45 to 60 days, depending upon temperature and a variety of other factors. During incubation, hatchling gender is determined by the temperature of the nest. For loggerheads in the Southeast, temperatures below 85° F (29.5°C) typically produce more males while above typically produce more females.
- The new hatchling will emerge from the nest, after days of digging its way up through the sand, and make its way to the ocean.
- Once in the water, the hatchling will swim to the nearest floating mass of sargassum seaweed and spend the first portion of its life there feeding, growing, and drifting with the currents.
- Of every 1,000 juvenile turtles that hatch, only two will survive to adulthood and reproduce.

### **Conservation Status:** Threatened

- The greatest threat is loss of nesting habitat due to coastal development, predation of nests, and human disturbances. Other major threats include pollution, climate change, incidental capture in longline fishing and shrimp trawling.