Life Under Water

Green Turtle

One of the largest sea turtles, the green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), is also known as green sea turtle, black sea turtle or Pacific green turtle. Distributed across the tropical and subtropical waters of the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans, the green turtle is known to nest in at least 80 countries. The common name of the species comes from the green-coloured fat and cartilage that is found beneath the carapace, not the color of the shell itself which typically ranges from olive to black. Like most sea turtles, green turtles travel great distances from their feeding grounds to reach their nesting sites; adult males and females typically return to the same beaches where they hatched to mate and lay eggs. Adult green turtles are herbivores and feed on seagrasses and algae. Seagrass beds are critical to sustain the growth and development of several invertebrate and fish species, and green turtles help to maintain lush and healthy seagrass beds in two ways. One, by clipping the top ends of seagrasses when they feed on them, green turtles stimulate the growth of seagrasses. Two, seagrasses that are fed on by green turtles are also quickly digested and act as recycled nutrients to improve the health of seagrass beds. Although green turtles fulfil important ecological functions in their ecosystem, and are thus critical to human food security, the future of the species is uncertain. Worldwide, all green turtle populations are threatened by overharvesting of eggs, hunting, illegal trade, habitat loss and marine pollution.

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