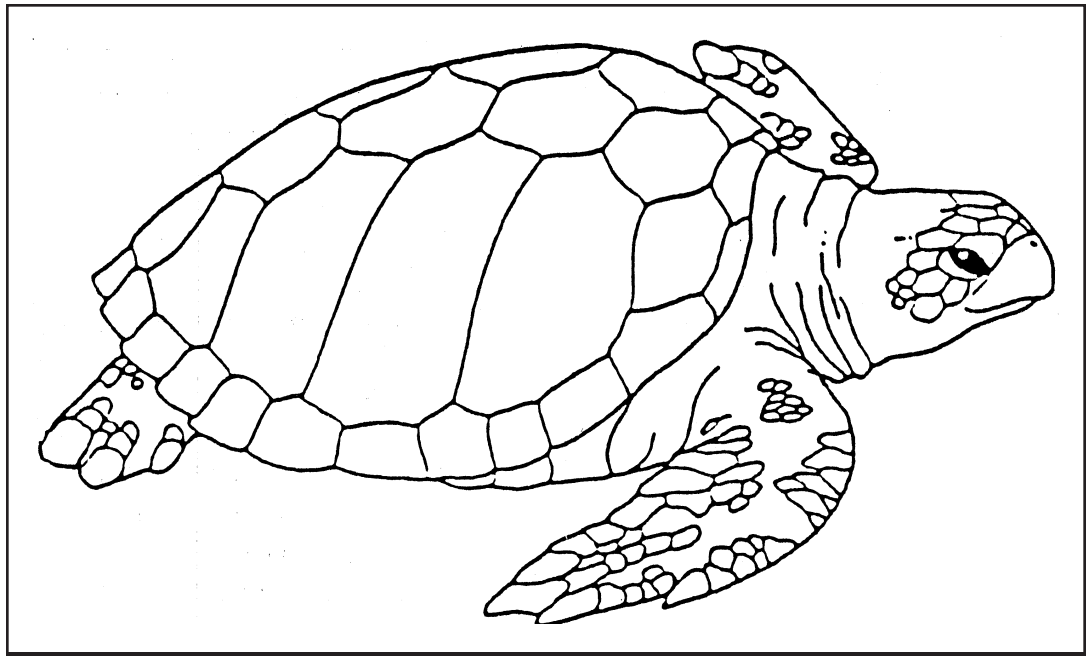




## Endangered Species of The Bahamas



### LOGGERHEAD TURTLE

#### SCIENTIFIC NAME

*Caretta caretta*

#### DESCRIPTION

The Loggerhead was named by fishermen who thought that the head of this turtle on the surface of the water resembled a floating log. Loggerheads can weigh up to 230 pounds and measure up to 43 inches in length. They have a heart shaped reddish brown *carapace* (hard top shell) with a large head (10-12 inches long) and a hard horn-shaped beak. Loggerhead turtles and other sea turtles are reptiles.

#### DIET

Primarily a carnivore (meat eater), Loggerheads feed on mollusks, crabs, and jellyfish. The Loggerhead's powerful jaws are well suited for eating hard shelled food items.

#### REPRODUCTION

Loggerhead Sea turtles mate in the water. After mating, the female Loggerhead turtle usually nests at night. She drags herself out of the sea and onto a nesting beach, up beyond the reach of high tide. Using her hind flippers like shovels, she scoops out a bottle shaped hole and lays about one hundred white, leathery eggs that look like ping-pong balls. She covers the nest with sand and returns to the sea, paying no further attention to the nest and never seeing her young.

The sun's rays heat the beach, warming the turtle eggs buried in the sand. Temperature will determine the sex of the young turtles. Females emerge from the eggs on top where warmer temperatures are found; males emerge from the bottom where cooler temperatures are found. The eggs are ready to hatch in about two months. Almost all must hatch at the same time, for they all must share the work of digging out of the nest. When the hatchlings are an inch or two below the surface of the beach they become quiet and wait for the surface temperature to drop, indicating nightfall. Under the protection

of darkness the baby turtles burst out of the nest and rush to the water. Phosphorescence, a light given off by organisms living in the sea, creates a glow that provides direction for these turtles as to the location of the ocean. The hatchling instinctively heads for this "bright" horizon. Tragically, in settled areas, hatchlings are now attracted to the bright lights of highways, hotels and parking lots and head away from the sea instead of towards it. They are usually killed. Thousands of hatchlings are lost this way each year.

## **HABITAT**

Loggerheads dwell in warm temperate waters around the world, venturing further from the tropics than other sea turtles to lay their eggs. They breed along the entire southeastern coast of the United States, and Florida continues to be their most important nesting ground. Loggerheads also nest in the Wider Caribbean, including The Bahamas.

## **STATUS**

The Loggerhead is declining in many parts of its range, especially in the Mediterranean, where it is nearly extinct. Its world population is probably no more than 100,000 adult females and males. It is listed in Appendix 1 of the Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES) meaning it is near extinction or very endangered. Unfortunately, it can still be harvested in The Bahamas during open season (August 1 - March 31).

## **THREATS**

**Commercial use:** Eggs are Illegally collected by poachers for food.

**Habitat destruction:** Commercial development and resulting pollution is contributing to a decline in Loggerhead and other sea turtle populations worldwide.

**Natural threats:** Adult sea turtles which are both fast and heavily armoured have few natural enemies, although sharks can do great damage to them. Young sea turtles have many enemies - crabs, dogs, raccoons, carnivorous fish and birds - that sometimes eat them immediately after hatching.

## **INTERESTING FACTS**

- Sea turtles sleep at night. While sleeping or resting they can remain underwater for hours without breathing.
- The taking of turtle eggs is prohibited by law in The Bahamas.



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