

# Hawksbill Sea Turtle

*Eretmochelys imbricata*



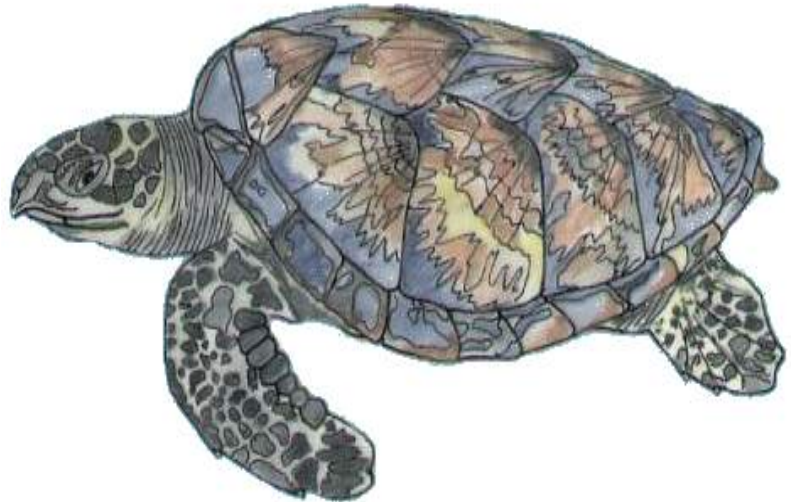
www.euroturtle.org

## Picture

English - Hawksbill Sea Turtle

French - Tortue imbriquée

Spanish - Tortuga de carey



## Size and Body Mass

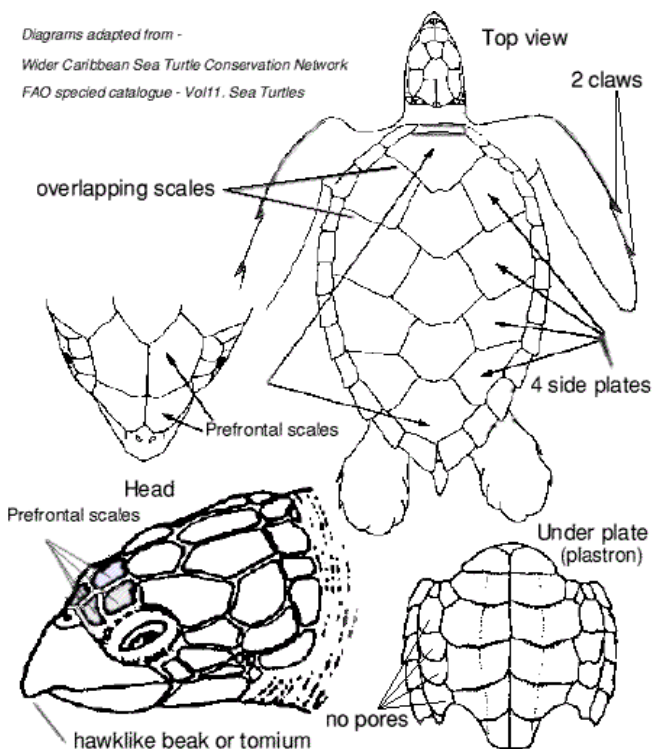
- Fairly small, 16-85cm
- SCL 76 - 91cm males; females range 53.3 to 73.7cm

Overall body mass in Kg:

- Mean mass 40 - 60 kg

Diagrams adapted from -

Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network  
FAO species catalogue - Vol11. Sea Turtles



## Diagnostic Features

- Carapace: Cardiform or elliptical.
- Scutes strongly imbricated at maturity but this overlapping characteristic is lost when older.
- Inframarginal scales lack pores.
- Flippers: Both fore and rear carry two claws, larger in the males.
- Head: Narrow, with a pointed beak.
- The tomium is not serrated.
- Colour: Colourful though Eastern Pacific strongly melanistic.
- Stripes and spots of brown, red, black and yellow on an amber background make the shell its attractive and valuable.

## Geographical Distribution

- Most tropical of the marine turtles, it is distributed throughout the central Atlantic and Pacific.
- Virtually all nesting restricted between latitudes 25° N and 35° S

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[www.euroturtle.org](http://www.euroturtle.org)

## Habitat and Biology



illustration: M. Demma © ICRAM

### Typical habitats:

- Favour clear, relatively shallow water of coastal reefs, bays, estuaries and lagoons.

### Migrations:

- Recapture of juveniles suggest that some do not migrate.
- They are, however, records of long migration in some areas e.g. nesting sites of Nicaragua to Jamaica, from Northern Australia to Papua New Guinea.

### Nesting areas:

- Generally nests alone or in small groups so reducing the effects of egg poaching.

### Nesting periods:

- Late spring and summer, nest every 2 or 3 years.

### Nesting behaviour:



illustration: M. Demma © ICRAM

- Lays several times in the season; mean 2 - 3, range 1 - 54 eggs
- Normally females nest at night though daytime nesting occurs in West Indian Islands
- A fairly agile turtle, it is able to scramble over rocks and roots to nest in the shade of vegetation. A feature peculiar to this species.

### Egg number, size and weight:

- Clutch size mean 150 (range 70 - 250) varies with area.
- Egg Size: Length 30 - 45 mm; Mass 20 - 31.6 g



illustration: M. Demma © ICRAM

### Size and weight of hatchlings:

- Length SCL38 - 46 mm
- Mass 8 - 17.6 g

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## Incubation time:

- Incubation time: 47 - 75 varying with place and point in the season



illustration: M. Demma © ICRAM

## Maturity:

- Uncertain but females 68 - 80 cm (SCL) long



illustration: M. Demma © ICRAM

## Courtship and Mating:

- Observed mating in shallow water.
- Females receptive after laying.

## Sex determination:

- Sex determining pivotal temperature 29° C (temperatures higher than 29° C result in more females, temperatures lower than 29° C.

## Hatching:

- First hours of night when temperature falls below 28° C.
- Hatchlings race into the sea and disappear for several years, returning to coastal water and benthic feeding when about 20 cm SCL.

## Hatchling mortality and predation:

- Eggs heavily predated by ghost crabs and by local carnivores e.g. mongoose, raccoons, monitor lizards, feral dogs and pigs.
- Hatchlings are eaten by a wide range of predators, especially frigate birds.

## Commensals and disease:

- No data.

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## Feeding:



Algae



Sponges



Tunicates

Coral

Illustrations: M. Demma © ICRAM

- Carnivorous: hunts in the crevices in rocks and corals up to depths of 100m.
- Diet includes corals, tunicates, algae and sponges.
- The species has an extraordinary ability to feed on sponges, remaining unaffected by sponge toxins and the spicules which embed its gut lining.

## Threats to Survival



**Loss of habitat due to coastal development,** including tourism and industrialisation



**Accidental capture by fishing activities**



**Human predation** through fishing, egg and shell collection. The latter is used in huge quantities to produce carey, tortoise-shell jewellery



**Animal predation**

Illustrations: M. Demma © ICRAM



**Tortoiseshell souvenirs, made from hawksbill turtles are still on sale in many tropical countries despite international laws banning the trade. (WSPA)**

- Large numbers, particularly juveniles are traded as stuffed trophies.
- Most of the trade is to Japan.
- The meat is eaten, despite being considered toxic in some areas.
- Hawksbills are hunted both on land (when the females emerge to nest) and at sea where they are harpooned or netted.
- Originally hunted with Remora, a species of fish which latches on to the turtle with a powerful sucker.