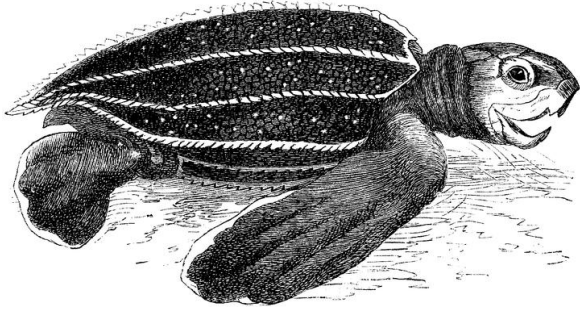


Earth Day Science Symposium: Sea Turtles

Why Is It Important To Protect Sea Turtles?



In the past, sea turtle populations been placed at serious risk by hunters who killed them for their meat and their beautiful shells. While hunting sea turtles is now illegal in many places, sea turtle populations are still at risk due to human activities such as fishing and shrimping, ocean pollution, and beach development. Because most female sea turtles

nest only at the beaches where they hatched, populations are extremely vulnerable to loss of nesting habitat. We can protect sea turtles by conserving nesting beaches, protecting nests and hatchlings from predation, and establishing and enforcing stringent laws against careless fishing practices and pollution.

10 Reasons to Protect Sea Turtles and Their Habitats

1. Sea turtles are among the world's most endangered species. Although they out-survived the dinosaurs and have been around for more than 250 million years, sea turtles are now threatened with extinction.
2. Six of the seven species of sea turtle are listed as critically endangered (leatherback, Kemp's ridley, hawksbill) or endangered (green, olive ridley, loggerhead). These turtles face a very high risk of extinction and could disappear from the earth forever.
3. Many of the threats that sea turtles face from longlines, gillnets, and dragnets put other species at risk. By eliminating these threats to sea turtles, we will help other marine species as well.
4. Sea turtles share their habitats (oceans and nesting beaches) with millions of other species. Protecting sea turtle habitat will ensure that all of these plants and animals also survive.
5. Sea turtles play an important role in the beach dune ecosystem. Their nests provide nutrients in the form of eggshells and other organic matter that helps beach dune vegetation grow and thrive.

6. Green sea turtles are among the few animals that eat sea grass, which grows in shallow coastal waters of at least 140 countries in the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian oceans and the Mediterranean Sea. Their grazing helps keep sea grass beds thick and healthy, providing breeding grounds for hundreds of other species, including fish, crustaceans, and mollusks (sea shells!).
7. People who have witnessed sea turtles laying eggs, and the emergence of hatchlings from nests, describe these as some of the most emotionally moving experiences of their lives. Something about a sea turtle inspires profound love and awe.
8. Sea turtles challenge the human intellect. Many scientists have devoted their entire careers to exploring the questions they pose, such as: How do sea turtles, which are reptiles, survive without fresh drinking water? How do some species remain under water for hours without drowning? How do they navigate the thousands of miles between nesting beaches and feeding grounds without losing their way?
9. Nesting sea turtles attract tourists and scientists to beaches in countries around the world, providing a wealth of economic and educational opportunities for nearby communities.
10. The most serious threats to sea turtles are caused by humans. If we are the cause of the problem, shouldn't we take responsibility for the solution?

