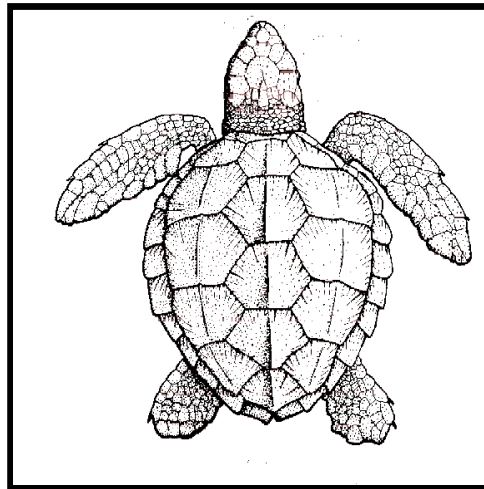


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## Loggerhead Sea Turtle (*Caretta caretta*)



Graphic Credit - NOAA, Jack Javech

**FAMILY:** Cheloniidae

- **Key North Florida Species**
- [Bald Eagle](#)
- [Florida Manatee](#)
- [Eastern Indigo Snake](#)
- [Florida Scrub-Jay](#)
- [Sea Turtles](#)
- [Whooping Crane](#)
- [Wood Stork](#)

**STATUS:** Threatened throughout its range (*Federal Register*, July 28, 1978). [See Federal Register Notice of 2010 Proposed Changes](#).

**DESCRIPTION:** The loggerhead is characterized by a large head with blunt jaws. The carapace and flippers are a reddish-brown color; the plastron is yellow. The carapace has five pairs of costal scutes with the first touching the nuchal scute. There are three large inframarginal scutes on each of the bridges between the plastron and carapace. Adults grow to an average weight of about 200 pounds. The species feeds on mollusks, crustaceans, fish, and other marine animals.

- **General Information**
- [Hunting-Fishing Licenses & Permits](#)
- [Injured/Nuisance Wildlife](#)
- [Wildlife Law Violations](#)

**REPRODUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT:** The United States nesting season extends from about May through August with nesting occurring primarily at night. Loggerheads are known to nest from one to seven times within a nesting season (mean is about 4.1 nests per season) at intervals of approximately 14 days. Mean clutch size varies from about 100 to 126 along the southeastern United States coast. Incubation ranges from about 45 to 95 days, depending on incubation temperatures, but averages 55 to 60 days for most clutches in Florida. Hatchlings generally emerge at night. Remigration intervals of 2 to 3 years are most common in nesting loggerheads, but remigration can vary from 1 to 7 years. Age at sexual maturity is believed to be about 20 to 30 years.

- **Other USFWS Resources**
- [Service Office](#)

**RANGE AND POPULATION LEVEL:** The loggerhead sea turtle occurs throughout the temperate and tropical regions of the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans. However, the majority of loggerhead nesting is at the western rims of the Atlantic and Indian oceans. The most recent reviews show that only two loggerhead nesting beaches have greater than 10,000 females nesting per year: South Florida (U.S.) and Masirah (Oman). Those beaches with 1,000 to 9,999 females nesting each year are North Florida through North Carolina (U.S.), Cape Verde Islands (Cape Verde), western Atlantic off Africa, and Western Australia (Australia). Smaller nesting concentrations

- [Southeast Region Contacts](#)
  - [Federal Register Notices](#)
  - [Regional Five-Year Reviews](#)
- (Bahamas), Quintana Roo and Yucatán (Mexico), Sergipe and Northern Bahia (Brazil), Southern Bahia to Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), Tongaland (South Africa), Mozambique, Arabian Sea Coast (Oman), Halaniyat Islands (Oman), Cyprus, Peloponnesus (Greece), Island of Zakynthos (Greece), Turkey, and Queensland (Australia). Although the major nesting concentrations in the United States are found in South Florida, loggerheads nest from Texas to Virginia. Total estimated nesting in the U.S. is approximately 68,000 to 90,000 nests/year. About 80 percent of loggerhead nesting in the southeastern U.S. occurs in six Florida counties (Brevard, Indian River, St. Lucie, Martin, Palm Beach, and Broward Counties). Adult loggerheads are known to make considerable migrations between foraging areas and nesting beaches. During non-nesting years, adult females from U.S. beaches are distributed in waters off the eastern U.S. and throughout the Gulf of Mexico, Bahamas, Greater Antilles, and Yucatán.

Genetic research involving analysis of mitochondrial DNA has identified five different loggerhead nesting subpopulations in the western North Atlantic: (1) the Northern Subpopulation occurring from North Carolina through Northeast Florida; (2) South Florida Subpopulation occurring from just north of Cape Canaveral on Florida's east coast and extending up to around Sarasota on Florida's west coast; (3) Dry Tortugas, Florida, Subpopulation, (4) Northwest Florida Subpopulation occurring on Florida's Panhandle beaches; and (5) Yucatán Subpopulation occurring on the eastern Yucatán Peninsula, Mexico. These data indicate that gene flow between these five regions is very low. If nesting females are extirpated from one of these regions, regional dispersal will not be sufficient to replenish the depleted nesting subpopulation. The South Florida Subpopulation has shown significant increases over the last 25 years, indicating that the population has progressed toward recovery. However, an analysis of nesting data for the years 1989-2002, a period encompassing index surveys that are more consistent than surveys in previous years, has shown no detectable trend. Past increases in South Florida loggerhead nesting are likely to have slowed. No long-term trends are available for the Northern Subpopulation, although researchers have documented substantial declines in nesting on some beaches since the early 1970s. From 1989-1998, no nesting trends were detectable for North Carolina, South Carolina, or Georgia. However, nests in Northeast Florida may be increasing, although data were too variable to detect a significant trend. Nesting surveys in the Dry Tortugas, Northwest Florida, and Yucatán Subpopulations have been too irregular to date to allow for a meaningful trend analysis.

**HABITAT:** The loggerhead is widely distributed within its range. It may be found hundreds of miles out to sea, as well as in inshore areas such as bays, lagoons, salt marshes, creeks, ship channels, and the mouths of large rivers. Coral reefs, rocky places, and ship wrecks are often used as feeding areas. Loggerheads nest on ocean beaches and occasionally on estuarine shorelines with suitable sand. Nests are typically made between the high tide line and the dune front. Most loggerhead hatchlings originating from U.S. beaches are believed to lead a pelagic existence in the North Atlantic gyre for an extended period of time, perhaps as long as 10 to 12 years, and are best known from the eastern Atlantic near the Azores and Madeira. Post-hatchlings have been found floating at sea in association with *Sargassum* rafts. Once they reach a certain size, these juvenile loggerheads begin recruiting to coastal areas in the western Atlantic where they become benthic feeders in lagoons, estuaries, bays, river mouths, and shallow coastal waters. These juveniles occupy coastal feeding grounds for a decade or more before maturing and making their first reproductive migration, the females returning to their natal beach to nest.

**CRITICAL HABITAT:** None designated.

**REASONS FOR CURRENT STATUS:** Threats include loss or degradation of nesting habitat from coastal development and beach armoring; disorientation of hatchlings by beachfront lighting; excessive nest predation by native and non-native predators; degradation of foraging habitat; marine pollution and debris; watercraft strikes; disease; and incidental take from channel dredging and commercial trawling, longline, and gill net fisheries. There is particular concern about the extensive incidental take of juvenile loggerheads in the eastern Atlantic by longline fishing vessels from several countries.

**MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION:** In the Southeast United States, major nest protection efforts and beach habitat protection are underway for most of the significant nesting areas, and significant progress has been made in reducing mortality from commercial fisheries in U.S. waters with the enforcement of turtle excluder device regulations. Many coastal counties and communities in Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina have developed lighting ordinances to

these efforts once they move outside U.S. waters, however, since legal and illegal fisheries activities in some countries are causing high mortality on loggerhead sea turtle nesting populations of the western north Atlantic region. Due to the long range migratory movements of sea turtles between nesting beaches and foraging areas, long-term international cooperation is absolutely essential for recovery and stability of nesting populations.

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## Actions

### [Final Designation of Nine Loggerhead Distinct Population Segments and Listing of Each](#)

#### Original 12-Month Finding and Proposed Reclassification Rule for Nine Loggerhead Sea Turtle Populations

- [Federal Register Notice](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Press Release](#)
- [2009 Loggerhead Sea Turtle Status Review](#)
- [07/12/2007 CBD et. al. Petition](#) - PDF, 165KB
- [11/15/2007 CBD et. al. Petition](#) - PDF, 297KB

## Reports

- [2007 Endangered Species Act \(ESA\) Sea Turtle Five-Year Reviews Index](#)
  - [Frequently Asked Questions](#) related to the 2007 five-year reviews
  - [Loggerhead sea turtle \(\*Caretta caretta\*\) 2009 status review](#): Loggerhead Biological Review Team Report to the National Marine Fisheries Service

## General Information

- [Loggerhead Sea Turtle General Recovery Information](#) - U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service resources for information on the loggerhead sea turtle and its recovery.

## Recovery Plans

#### 2008 Northwest Atlantic Population of the Loggerhead Sea Turtle , Second Revision<

- [2008 NW Atlantic Loggerhead Recovery Plan](#) - PDF 2.0MB
- [Executive Summary](#)
- [Download Annotated Threats Tables Here](#)
- [Press Release](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)

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Last updated: September 16, 2011