



# flatback

AQWA - TURTLE GUIDE



*Flatback turtles sleep on the sandy sea floor*

**SCIENTIFIC NAME:** *Natator depressus*  
**MEANING:** 'swimming' 'sunken / low'

Flatback turtles get their names from their smooth, low domed shell.



**SIZE**  
 MAX: 98cm

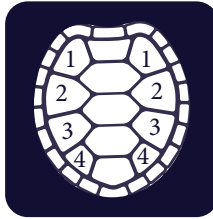
## KEY IDENTIFICATION FEATURES



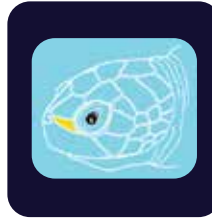
AUSTRALIAN



MIXED | COMBO TRACK



4 COSTAL SCALES



1 PAIR PREOCULAR SCALES



SLICING JAW



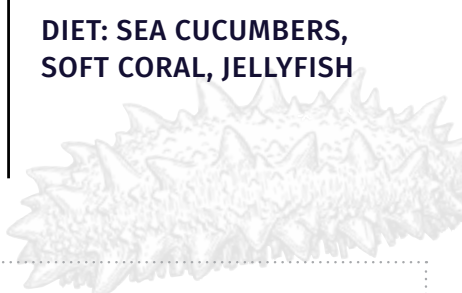
AREAS FOUND

**CONSERVATION STATUS (AUSTRALIA):** VULNERABLE

*sand specialist*

**Main Nesting Areas (WA):**  
 Summer nesters: Dampier Archipelago, Barrow Island, Mundabullangana, Eighty Mile Beach  
 Winter nesters: Cape Domett  
**Peak Nesting Season:**  
 Summer nesters: November - January  
 Winter nesters: July - September  
**Peak Hatching Season:**  
 Summer nesters: December - March  
 Winter nesters: August - October

**NORTHERN AUSTRALIA IS THE ONLY PLACE IN THE WORLD THAT THESE TURTLES NEST**



**DIET:** SEA CUCUMBERS, SOFT CORAL, JELLYFISH



**KEY HABITAT:** SHALLOW COASTAL WATERS OF AUSTRALIA'S CONTINENTAL SHELF  
**ECOLOGICAL ROLE:** BY DIGGING IN THE SAND TO MAKE A BED OR FIND FOOD, THESE TURTLES TURN OVER THE 'SOIL' HELPING WITH THE BREAKDOWN AND MIXING OF NUTRIENTS.



# green

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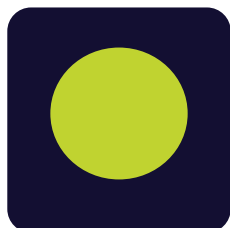


**SCIENTIFIC NAME:** *Chelonia mydas*  
**MEANING:** 'tortoise' 'wetness'

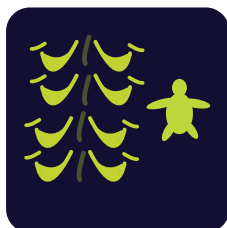
Green turtles get their common name from their fat - it is green from all the green food that they eat!



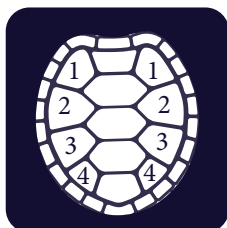
## KEY IDENTIFICATION FEATURES



GREEN FAT



PARALLEL TRACK



4 COSTAL SCALES



1 PAIR PREFRONTAL SCALES



CUTTING JAW



AREAS FOUND

**CONSERVATION STATUS (AUSTRALIA):** VULNERABLE

Main Nesting Areas (WA):  
Lacepede Islands, Barrow Island  
Montebellow Islands, Dampier Archipelago,  
Ningaloo coast, Browse Island, Ashmore Reef,  
Cocos (Keeling) Islands

Peak Nesting Season:  
November - March

Peak Hatching Season:  
January - April

guardian of the ocean's  
nursery (seagrass beds)

**THE MOST COMMON TURTLE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN**

**DIET:**  
SEAGRASS,  
ALGAE



**KEY HABITAT:**  
SEAGRASS BEDS, CORAL REEF

**ECOLOGICAL ROLE:**  
GRAZING ON THE TIPS OF SEAGRASS ENCOURAGES ITS GROWTH AND HELPS CREATE THICK LUSH SEAGRASS BEDS.



# hawksbill

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*A pointed beak helps reach into cracks and crevices for food.*

**SCIENTIFIC NAME:** *Eretmochelys imbricata*  
**MEANING:** 'oar turtle' 'overlapping'

Only hawksbill turtles have overlapping scales. The pattern these scales create has been prized since ancient times. The common name comes from their pointed hawk-like beak.



**SIZE**  
MAX: 90cm

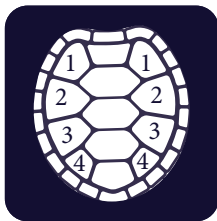
## KEY IDENTIFICATION FEATURES



**POINTED BEAK**



**ALTERNATING TRACK**



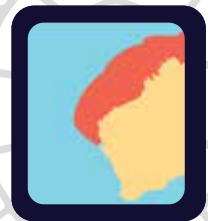
**4 COSTAL SCALES**



**2 PAIRS PREFRONTAL SCALES**



**CUTTING JAW**



**AREAS FOUND**

**CONSERVATION STATUS (AUSTRALIA): VULNERABLE**

*guardian of coral reefs*

Main Nesting Areas (WA):  
Dampier Archipelago, Montebello Islands, Lowendal Islands

Peak Nesting Season:  
October - January

Peak Hatching Season:  
December - March

**WA HAS THE ONLY LARGE POPULATION OF HAWKSBILL TURTLES REMAINING IN THE EAST INDIAN OCEAN**

**DIET: SPONGES, SOFT CORAL, ALGAE, INVERTEBRATES**

**KEY HABITAT: CORAL REEF**  
**ECOLOGICAL ROLE:**

**BY KEEPING THE FAST-GROWING SPONGES AT BAY HAWKSBILL TURTLES GIVE SLOWER GROWING CORALS THE CHANCE TO GROW.**





# leatherback

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The ridges on their shell make leatherbacks more hydrodynamic.

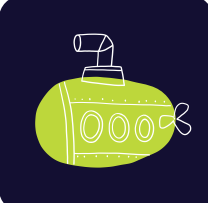
**SCIENTIFIC NAME:** *Dermochelys coriacea*  
**MEANING:** 'skin turtle' 'leathery'

Leatherback turtles get their names from their soft leathery skin. They can dive deep as their shell won't crack under pressure.



**SIZE**  
MAX: 305cm

## KEY IDENTIFICATION FEATURES



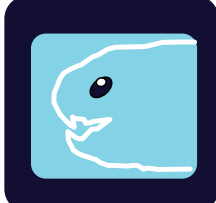
**DIVES INTO THE MIDNIGHT ZONE**



**PARALLEL TRACK**



**5 RIDGES - NO SCALES**



**NO PREFRONTAL SCALES**



**SLICING JAW**



**AREAS FOUND**

**CONSERVATION STATUS (AUSTRALIA):** ENGANGERED

No known nesting sites in Western Australia.

Leatherback turtles living in Australian waters migrate to breed in neighbouring countries such as Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

**LEATHERBACK TURTLES HAVE LIVED ON OUR PLANET SINCE BEFORE THE DINOSAURS**

protects fish stocks

**DIET: JELLYFISH**



**KEY HABITAT:**  
OPEN OCEAN

**ECOLOGICAL ROLE:**

**BY CONTROLLING THE NUMBER OF JELLYFISH LEATHERBACK TURTLES HELP ENSURE THERE ARE PLENTY OF FISH IN THE SEA.**



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# loggerhead



**SCIENTIFIC NAME:** *Caretta caretta*

**MEANING:** 'turtle' 'turtle'

Loggerhead turtles get their common name from their large head - it needs to be big to hold their powerful crushing jaws.

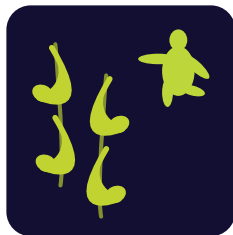


**SIZE**  
MAX: 110cm

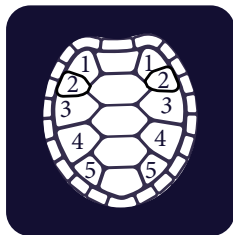
## KEY IDENTIFICATION FEATURES



**HEAD IS 20% OF ITS BODY SIZE**



**ALTERNATING TRACK**



**5 COSTAL SCALES**



**2 PAIRS PREFRONTAL SCALES**



**CRUSHING JAW**



**AREAS FOUND**

**CONSERVATION STATUS (AUSTRALIA):** ENDANGERED

Main Nesting Areas (WA):  
Dirk Hartog Island, Ningaloo coast

Peak Nesting Season:  
October - February

Peak Hatching Season:  
December - April

**ONE OF THE MOST ENDANGERED TURTLES IN AUSTRALIAN WATERS**

*nutrient recycler*

**DIET: SHELLFISH, CRABS, SEA URCHINS, JELLYFISH**



**KEY HABITAT:**

CORAL REEFS, COASTAL BAYS, ESTUARIES, OCEANIC

**ECOLOGICAL ROLE:**

CRACKING AND CRUSHING THE HARD SHELLS OF THEIR PREY SPEEDS UP THE WAY NUTRIENTS ARE RELEASED BACK INTO THE FOOD CHAIN.



# olive ridley

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Olive ridley turtles are known for all coming ashore at once

**SCIENTIFIC NAME:** *Lepidochelys olivacea*  
**MEANING:** 'scale turtle' 'olive'

Olive ridleys get their names from their olive-coloured scales. They also have more scales on their shells than other turtles.



**SIZE**  
MAX: 65cm

## KEY IDENTIFICATION FEATURES

<b>2 CLAWS ON FLIPPERS</b>	<b>ALTERNATING TRACK</b>	<b>6 OR MORE COSTAL SCALES</b>	<b>2 PAIRS PREFRONTAL SCALES</b>	<b>CRUSHING JAW</b>	<b>AREAS FOUND</b>

**CONSERVATION STATUS (AUSTRALIA):** ENDANGERED

It was recently discovered that olive ridley turtles nest in WA! They nest in the Camden Sound Marine Park and elsewhere in the Kimberley, but are very scarce.

**THE SMALLEST MARINE TURTLE IN AUSTRALIA**

*nutrient recycler*

**DIET:** MOLLUSCS, CRUSTACEANS, FISH, JELLYFISH, STARFISH



**KEY HABITAT:** COASTAL BAYS, ESTUARIES, OCEANIC  
**ECOLOGICAL ROLE:** BY CRACKING AND CRUSHING THE HARD SHELLS OF THEIR PREY, THEY INCREASE THE RATE AT WHICH NUTRIENTS ARE RELEASED BACK INTO THE FOOD CHAIN.