

Sea turtles of Florida

Endangered sea turtles

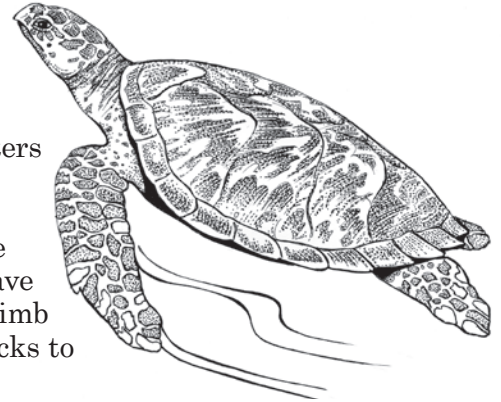
Green sea turtles

Green turtles get their name from the color of their body fat. Their shell is brown with dark spots.

Green turtles differ from other sea turtles because when they are young, they eat meat. But, when they become adults, they prefer plants and are the only adult sea turtles that eat sea grass and seaweed. This species usually lays about 2,600 nests each year on Florida's sandy beaches.

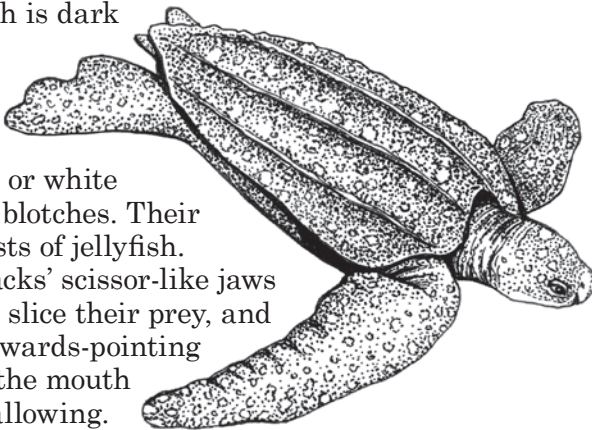


that attaches itself to the sea floor. Hawksbills often live in the Florida Keys waters and off the coast in other parts of Florida. They are very agile and have been known to climb over reefs and rocks to nest on beaches.



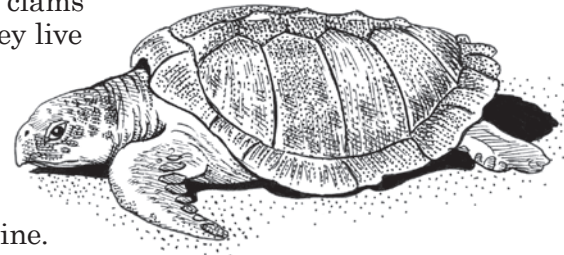
Leatherback sea turtles

Leatherback sea turtles are the largest of all. The largest leatherback, from its nose to the end of its carapace (shell), was nearly 10 feet long. Leatherbacks are easy to identify by their smooth shell which is dark brown to black and marked with pink, blue or white spots and blotches. Their diet consists of jellyfish. Leatherbacks' scissor-like jaws help them slice their prey, and stiff, backwards-pointing spines in the mouth aid in swallowing. Females nest about 290 times each year in Florida.



Kemp's Ridley sea turtles

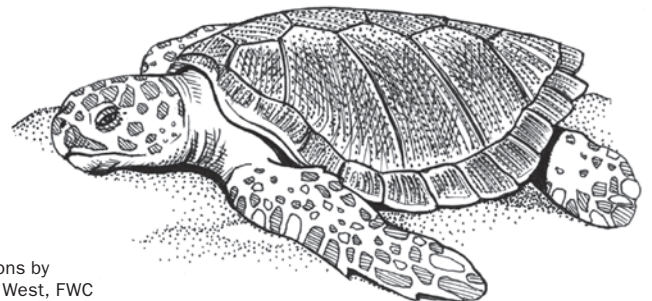
Kemp's Ridley sea turtles are the smallest and most endangered of all sea turtles. These olive-green turtles prefer blue crabs to eat, but they also eat jellyfish, clams and fish. They live primarily in the Gulf of Mexico but regularly travel as far north as Maine.



Most common sea turtle in Florida (threatened)

Loggerhead sea turtles

Loggerhead sea turtles – the most common in Florida and the official state saltwater reptile – are reddish-brown and named for their large head. They are very large turtles which can grow to weigh as much as 350 pounds. They become mature when they are between 15 and 30 years old and continue to reproduce for many years. Loggerheads feed primarily on mollusks or shellfish such as clams or crabs and use their powerful jaw muscles to crush the shells of their prey. The southeastern United States is one of the most important nesting grounds in the world for these turtles. Brevard and Palm Beach counties have the most nesting areas.



Florida Fish and Wildlife
Conservation Commission
Habitat and Species Conservation
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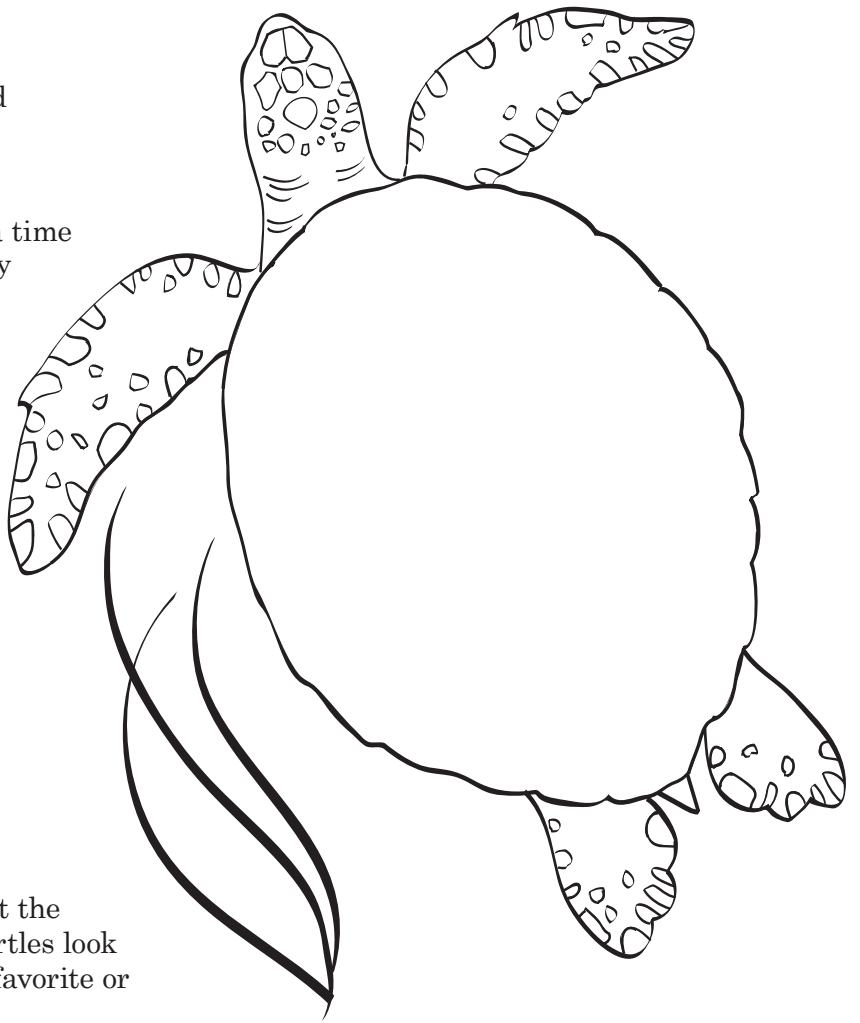
illustrations by
Lizabeth West, FWC

Helping sea turtles survive

Fun sea turtle facts

- Sea turtles have remained almost unchanged for 110 million years and are some of the oldest creatures on Earth.
- Sea turtles remain underwater for hours at a time if they are sleeping or resting. When active, they surface several times an hour to breathe.
- Nest temperatures determine the sex of hatchlings. Warm temperatures result in more females and cool temperatures produce more males.

All sea turtles are protected by the Endangered Species Act. Loggerheads are threatened, which means they could become endangered if not protected adequately. The other four species of sea turtles are endangered which means they are in danger of extinction.



Color a turtle

Now that you know what the different types of sea turtles look like, you can color your favorite or design your own.



Artificial lighting confuses nesting sea turtles.

What you can do to help

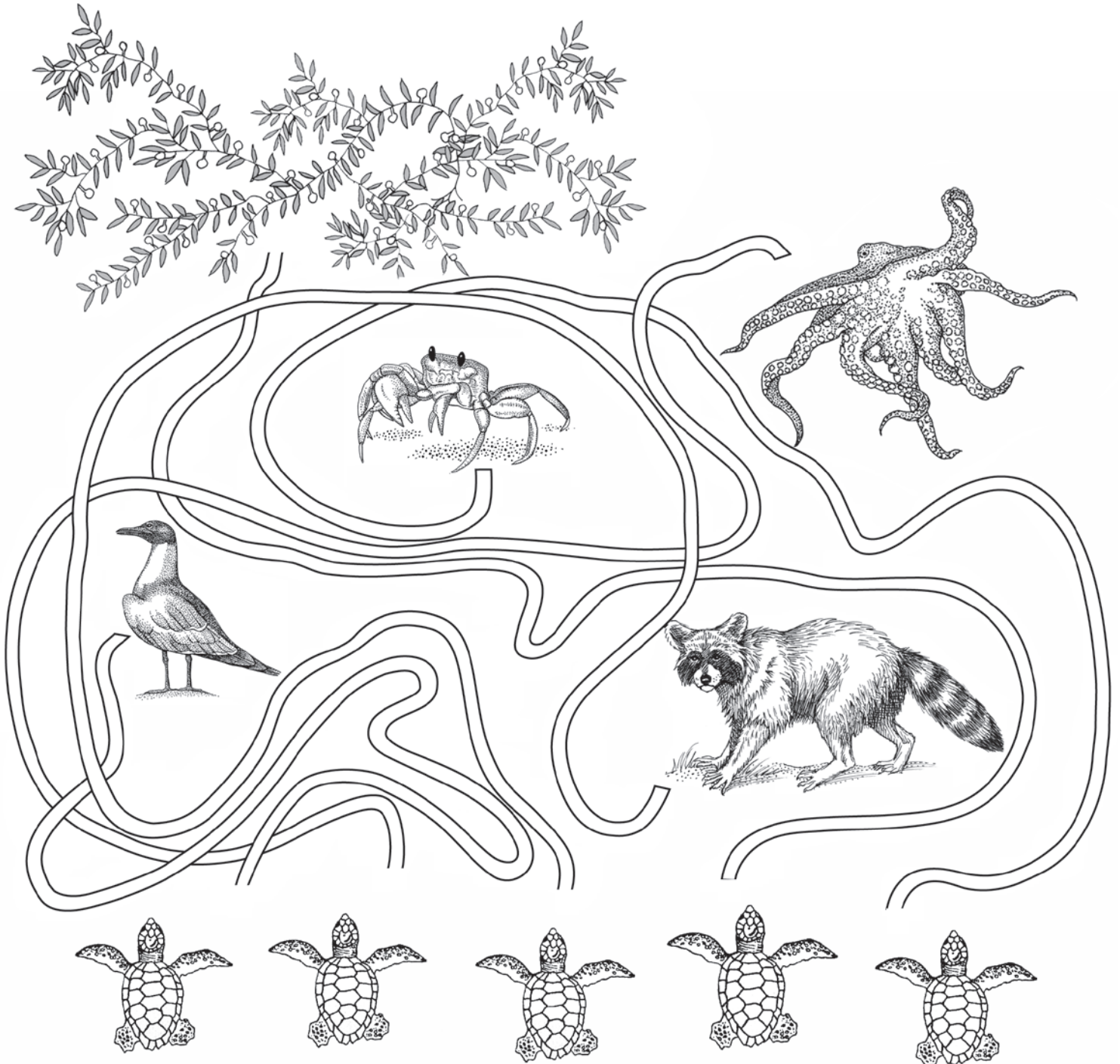
- Anyone who lives near a beach should turn lights off at night – especially those seen from the beach.
- Never leave beach chairs or other items out overnight. They can entrap nesting sea turtles or hatchlings, leading to their death.
- Never approach or take flash photos of turtles. Lights and noise can hinder turtles' ability to nest or find their way back to the sea.
- Keep oceans, bays and rivers pollution-free. Take a trash bag with you when you go the beach and remove any trash you see. Purchase a sea turtle decal or license tag from the local tax collector's office to help with protection efforts in Florida.

Report injured or dead sea turtles, poaching of eggs or other wildlife emergencies. Call the Wildlife Alert Hotline, 1-888-404-FWCC (3922)

Avoiding predators

This group of tiny sea turtles just hatched from their sandy nest. They face many dangers on their way to the sea. They must avoid predators – other animals that eat them – including raccoons, ghost crabs, sea gulls, octopi and some fish. Many sea turtles are eaten by these predators before they become adults. In fact, only one in 1,000 sea turtles hatchlings will survive to adulthood. To avoid being eaten by predators, many sea turtles swim offshore to floating seaweed beds, where they live for many years.

Follow the paths below to find out which tiny turtle will make it to the safety of the seaweed bed.



Color your own sea turtle license plate

After approximately two months in their sandy nest on the beach, two-inch-long baby sea turtles – hatchlings – crawl out of their eggs and scurry down to the sea. The hatchlings are attracted to the sea by the shiny reflection of the night sky over the ocean. Sometimes hatchlings get confused by bright lights along the beach and head toward land instead of the sea. So, it is very important to turn off lights seen from the beach (including indoor lights) during June, July, August, September and October.

Below is a sea turtle license tag. It shows a hatchling on its journey to the sea. The tags are sold at local tax collectors' offices. The money raised from tag sales supports sea turtle protection, research and recovery programs. Show your support by coloring your very own sea turtle license tag. After you finish, you can display it by cutting it out along the dotted line.

