

Loggerhead Sea Turtles

The Mediterranean Sea has three species of marine turtles: loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*), green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), and leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*).



The Loggerhead Sea Turtle (*Caretta caretta*) is the only member of the genus *Caretta*. The genus name "*Caretta*" is a latinisation of the French "*caret*", meaning turtle, tortoise, or sea turtle. A loggerhead sea turtle reportedly grows up to 364 kg and 1.1 m long. Their shell color is a reddish brown and the color of their skin is brown yellow.

The species feeds on shellfish, crustaceans, fish, jellyfish, crabs and shrimp and other small to medium-sized marine animals, which they crush with their large and powerful jaws. They are immune to the toxins of a Portuguese Man o' War as the turtles have often been seen feeding on them.

As with other sea turtles, females return to lay their eggs on or near the same beach where they themselves hatched. Unlike other sea turtles, courtship and mating usually do not take place near the nesting beach but rather along the migration routes between feeding and breeding grounds.

In the Mediterranean, Loggerheads mate from late March to early June. The female nesting season is at its peak in June and July, but this depends on the nesting beach. The clutch may vary from 70 to 150 eggs. Each egg is roughly the size and shape of a ping-pong ball. The average interval between nesting seasons is two to three years.

After approximately 60 days, the hatchlings emerge usually at night when protection from predation is greater. Most loggerheads that reach adulthood live for longer than 30 years, and can often live over 150 years.

Loggerhead Sea Turtles were once intensively hunted for their meat and eggs, along with their fat which was used in cosmetics and medication. They were also killed for their shells, which were used to make items such as combs. As a result, both subspecies are now internationally protected. Today the main threat to the adult loggerheads lies in shrimp trawls and crab fishing nets, to which many loggerheads annually fall victim. Furthermore, adults are often injured by speedboat propellers and by swallowing fishing hooks or getting caught in nets.

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In 2008, some 800 loggerhead turtle eggs, brought over from Cape Verde, were buried in a beach on the island of Fuerteventura in an attempt to reintroduce the species to the Canary Islands. 200 more were sent to the Centro de Recuperacion de Especies in Gran Canaria and a further 400 to the Estación Biológica in Doñana, Andalucía. It will be at least 15 years before the success of the project can be measured.

Twenty-three loggerhead turtles have been washed up on UK and Irish beaches so far in 2009 and sadly only 2 of those have survived. On a happy note 'Dink' and 'James' have been flown to Gran Canaria and released back into the sea. To find out more about this fantastic effort by the Blue Reef Aquarium in Newquay - Click [HERE](#) to visit the BBC website

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/7479231.stm>

On a Spanish note, in April, 4 loggerhead turtles were released back into the Mediterranean from a beach in Torre Vieja. These had been rescued from different locations and brought back to full health before being released.