

Sea Turtle Survival [ME]

Adapted from NOAA Fisheries

Grades: K-2

Time: 45 minutes to 1 hour

Goals: To understand what it means to be endangered and how humans can be the cause.

Objectives:

Students will be able to: define threatened; define endangered; understand sea turtle life cycles; describe sea turtle nesting; and describe some threats to sea turtles.

Directions: Help the sea turtle make it from the nest on the beach to the water without being harmed by any natural or human threats.



Key Words:

Reptiles

Threatened

Endangered

Extinct

Survival

Pollution

Commercial fishing

Background Information:

Adapted from NOAA Fisheries and New Wave of Learning

There are a lot of marine species that are considered threatened or endangered because their population numbers are low. When the Endangered Species Act was written in 1973, threatened species were defined as “any species which is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future...” Endangered species were defined as “any species which is in danger of extinction...” These threats are often caused by humans.

Some of these threats take years to affect the populations, such as overfishing or hunting. Marine species, such as sea turtles, though, take a long time to reproduce, which means any changes to their populations could affect their species quicker. The more individuals that are taken from the ocean or harvested as eggs, the fewer individuals will remain.

There are seven species of sea turtles worldwide, most of them living, breeding, and feeding in tropical and sub-tropical areas. Aside from the Australian flatback turtle and the Olive Ridley turtle, the remainder can all be found in Atlantic waters. Two species of sea turtles, the loggerhead and Kemp’s Ridley have been known to migrate great distances in search of food and have been spotted along the mid-Atlantic coast during their fall and spring migrations.

Both loggerhead and Kemp’s Ridley sea turtles are susceptible to human-related effects such as marine debris, oil spills, entanglement in fishing gear, swallowing baited hooks, and being hit by boats. Plastics are ingested or get stuck around their throats and limbs. Oil is also ingested. Fishing gear that is left in the ocean, whether it is a ghost net or tangled fishing line can wrap around any body part or can be ingested. Baited hooks can be snagged on their flippers or they can be ingested and have to be surgically removed. Boat propellers have the power to slice completely through a three-inch thick shell and if the spinal column is severed, the turtle can become paralyzed. After being struck by a boat, they become incapacitated and the wounds quickly become infected by parasites and bacteria.