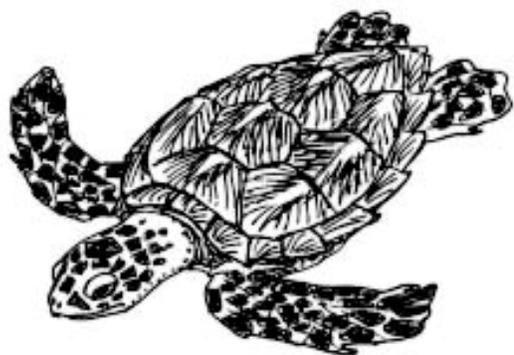


## N.C. Plant and Animal Species Fact Sheets



### Loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*)

#### **Introduction**

Naturalists and scientists have studied the earth's remarkable array of plants and animals. Inhabitants of the oceans have had less study due to their inaccessibility. The sea turtle has been cloaked in mystery. We know so little about this ocean dweller that only comes ashore to dig a nest and lay eggs. After egg laying the female returns to the open ocean.

#### **What do they look like?**

Sea turtles are reptiles and like all turtles they have a toothless beak and a soft body protected by a hard shell. They are different than land turtles in that their legs are modified flippers. They have no distinctive toes.

#### **How big are they?**

Loggerheads weigh between 200-300lbs, (91kg-136kg). The carapace (shell) is 36-42 in. long (91cm-107cm).

#### **Where do they live?**

They live in the open sea and females only come to the beach of their birth to lay eggs. Males never return to land but like land

turtles, they breath air and need to return to the ocean surface often.

#### **Who eats them?**

They have few predators except killer whales and sharks. The young are eaten by fish, crabs and birds.

#### **What do they eat?**

Their diet consists of mollusks, sea urchins, jellyfish, shrimp, crabs and fish.

#### **How do they mate?**

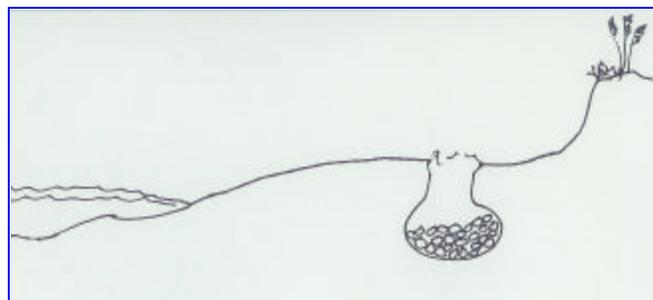
Males and females gather offshore for their mating rituals. After mating the female stores the viable sperm for the rest of the mating season allowing her to nest 1- 6 times.

#### **What are the young like?**

The young look like (miniature adults except their shells are only about 2 in. long. (5cm)) They hatch about 60-80 days after being laid. At dusk they crawl out of the nest and rapidly go to the surf to catch the currents that will carry them away from shore.

#### **How long do they live?**

It is unknown how long loggerheads live. It is believed they may live 80-100 years.



Female turtles crawl up the beach to dig a nest above the high tide line and near the toe of the dunes.

## N.C. Plant and Animal Species Fact Sheets

---

### ***People Interactions***

Many turtles are killed by choking on trash such as plastic bags. They can mistake them for a juicy jellyfish. The bags fill their stomachs so that they are not hungry or they choke. Sea turtles also drown in shrimp nets as they cannot surface to breathe. Offshore shrimp nets are now required to be equipped with a TED (Turtle Excluder Device) a small net which allows shrimp into the back of the net and turtles to escape.

Sea turtles also require beaches of the proper sand, shape and darkness for them to lay nests. Coastal development may change the beaches.

### **EstuaryLive**

[www.EstuaryLive.org](http://www.EstuaryLive.org)

North Carolina National Estuarine Research Reserve

[www.ncnerr.org](http://www.ncnerr.org) or tel. 252.728.2170

Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Program

<http://www.apnep.org/> or tel. 252.946.6481

Carolina Estuarine Reserve Foundation

[www.cerf.us](http://www.cerf.us)



Written by  
Colleen & Bo Sosnicki.  
Title I Illustrations  
by Debbie Pagliughi.

