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PRESENTS

HAWKSBILL SEA TURTLE

Eretmochelys imbricata

The hawksbill sea turtle belongs to the Cheloniidae family, which includes the turtle species with a hard shell. They prefer coastal environments with rocky and coral reefs, although you can also find them living in mangrove forests. Globally, this species is critically endangered since the number of nesting females has decreased 80% in the last 100 years.

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TAXONOMY

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Reptilia
Order: Testudines
Family: Cheloniidae
Genus: *Eretmochelys*
Species: *E. imbricata*

NOM-059 SEMARNAT
P
ENDANGERED

Conservation status:
• Nom 059 – **Pr** (endangered)
• IUCN-**CR** (critically endangered)

Distribution: Tropical and subtropical regions on the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian oceans. In Mexico, in the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, and Pacific.

Diet: Omnivore with a diverse diet including sponges, tunicates, jellyfish, algae, seagrass and mangrove roots.

Reproduction: They reach sexual maturity between 20 and 35 years of age. Adults display sexual dimorphism.

Predators: Eggs and hatchlings are targeted by sea birds, crabs, raccoons, and feral dogs. Once at sea, their main predators are large fish like dorado, sharks, and crocodiles.

ANATOMY

Hawksbill sea turtles spend most of their lives in the ocean and their bodies are adapted for this purpose: their carapace is oval-shaped and flat making it hydrodynamic.

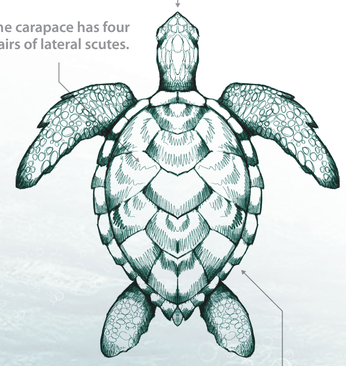
Average size: adults' carapace **61 to 106 cm long**

Average weight: **45-68 kg (adults)**



The head is narrow and has two pairs of prefrontal scales.

The carapace has four pairs of lateral scutes.



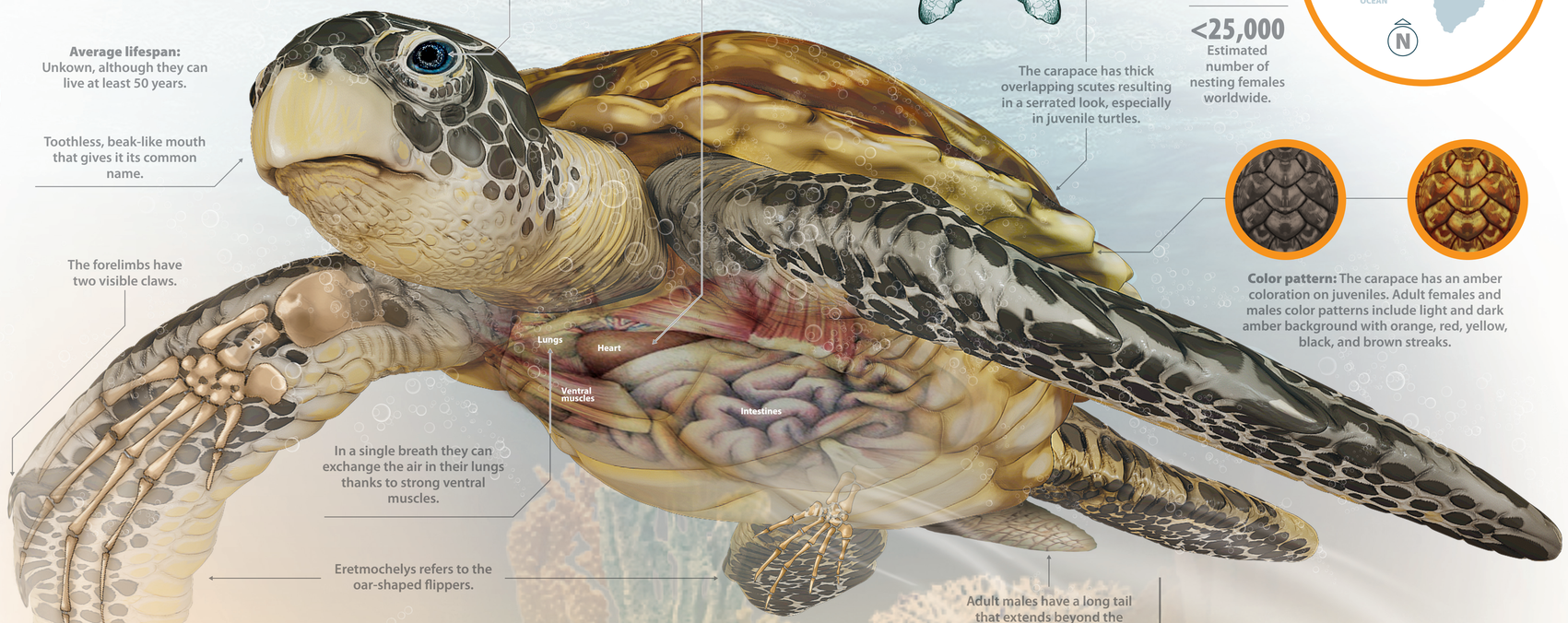
They have a pair of salt glands that help eliminate excess salt ingested from sea water.

When they're underwater, their heart rate slows to conserve oxygen.

Average lifespan: Unkown, although they can live at least 50 years.

Toothless, beak-like mouth that gives it its common name.

The carapace has thick overlapping scutes resulting in a serrated look, especially in juvenile turtles.



The forelimbs have two visible claws.

In a single breath they can exchange the air in their lungs thanks to strong ventral muscles.

Eretmochelys refers to the oar-shaped flippers.

Adult males have a long tail that extends beyond the carapace.

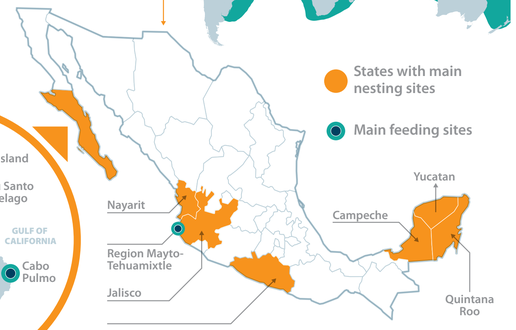
Color pattern: The carapace has an amber coloration on juveniles. Adult females and males color patterns include light and dark amber background with orange, red, yellow, black, and brown streaks.

DISTRIBUTION

There are 13 populations of hawksbill sea turtles living in tropical and subtropical regions of the Pacific, Atlantic, and Indian oceans. The Eastern Pacific population, which includes the individuals that move between Mexico and Peru, is considered the most threatened of all with less than 600 nesting females.



The Gulf of California and the Pacific coast of Baja California Sur are the northernmost limit of its distribution. Some of the most important feeding grounds for juveniles are located here.



BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR, MEXICO



+50 Feeding grounds identified in Mexico's Northwest.

<25,000 Estimated number of nesting females worldwide.

THREATS

International illegal trade of the carapace.

In Mexico, they were hunted for their shell, meat, eggs, and having taxidermy turtles was considered a symbol of good fortune.

Incidental and illegal capture, egg and nest poaching, coastal development, and pollution in nesting and feeding grounds.

Extreme temperatures in nesting beaches caused by climate change.

9 million number of individuals that were hunted between 1844 and 1992 for their shell.

REPRODUCTION



Nesting seasons vary by region, but in general they nest between April and November.

Females migrate to nesting sites every 2 to five years.

Mating occurs in the water and females can lay between three to five nests with over 100 eggs each.

The incubation period lasts between 50 and 60 days. Sex is determined by temperature.
>29ºC - more females
<29ºC - more males

BEHAVIOR



Sea turtles are ectotherms so they prefer shallow habitats in warm waters and can float on the surface to help regulate body temperature.



They breathe air, so they need to swim to the surface but can remain underwater for hours at a time.

ECOLOGICAL ROLE

Keep animal and algae populations under control by feeding on them.

They transport nutrients from their feeding grounds to their nesting grounds during migrations.

Eggs that do not hatch become sources of nutrients for decomposers and coastal vegetation.

CONSERVATION TIMELINE

1968: Species is included in IUCN's red list as endangered. Mexico establishes regulations for sea turtle capture, use and trade.

1971: Capture and trade for all sea turtle species are banned for two years.

1972: Capture is allowed for fishing cooperatives.

1975: The hawksbill's Atlantic Ocean population is included in CITES' Appendix I, and the population on the Indo-Pacific in Appendix II.

1977: All hawksbill populations are included in Appendix I of CITES.

1990: All capture and trade of sea turtles in Mexico is banned, and the hawksbill is added to the Norma Oficial Mexicana 059.

1991: Jail time is added to penal code for possession, trade or killing sea turtles.

1993: Mexico establishes the national committee for the protection and conservation of sea turtles.

2008: Protection efforts for the Eastern Pacific population are renewed after finding important nesting sites in El Salvador and Nicaragua.

2012: The PACE Tortuga Carey is updated.

Credits:
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