

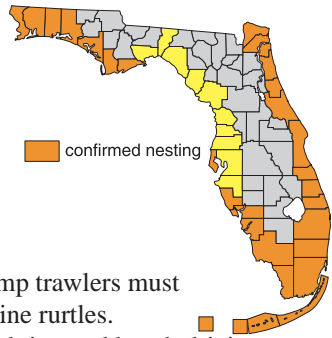
GREEN TURTLE

Chelonia mydas

Order:	Testudines
Family:	Cheloniidae
FNAI Ranks:	G3/S2
U.S. Status:	Endangered
FL Status:	Endangered

Status applies to eggs as well as turtles. Shrimp trawlers must be fitted with excluder devices to release marine turtles.

Some local ordinances regulate beachfront lighting and beach driving.



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hatchling
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Description: A large sea turtle that is dark above, light below, and which bears only a single pair of elongate scales (prefrontals) between eyes; front limbs modified as flippers. Upper shell (carapace) of adult: olive with dark spots; juvenile: brown to olive with radiating lines. Carapace without central keel except in young, and with only four large, non-overlapping scales (costal scutes) on each side, the first one not in contact with nuchal scute (small scale over neck). Lower shell (plastron) cream to yellow. Adults reach 35 - 48 in. (88 - 122 cm) shell length and 220 - 450 lbs. (104 - 204 kg). Hatchlings 1.6 - 2.4 in. (41 - 61 mm) shell length, black to dark gray above, white ventrally and along rear margins of flippers, with a low keel on back and two keels on plastron.

Similar Species: Hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*; see species account) is smaller as adult, has mid-dorsal keel throughout life, and pointed beak and overlapping carapacial scales except in old turtles. Loggerhead and Kemp's ridley (*Caretta caretta* and *Lepidochelys kempii*; see species accounts) have five or more costal scutes, the first touching the nuchal. Loggerhead is distinctively reddish-brown; much smaller Kemp's ridley has

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nearly circular, grayish to olive-green shell. All three have two pairs of prefrontal scales between eyes. Hawksbill and loggerhead hatchlings are darker below and have pronounced keels on back.

Habitat: Estuarine and marine coastal and oceanic waters; nests on coastal sand beaches, often near dune line, sufficiently high to avoid tidal inundation. Large juveniles and adults feed on seagrasses and algae. Hatchlings use offshore floating sargassum mats; juveniles frequent coastal bays, inlets, lagoons, and offshore worm reefs.

Seasonal Occurrence: Present in Florida waters year-round, but more commonly observed during warmer months. Nests late May - September; hatchlings emerge and head toward sea August - November.

Florida Distribution: Coastal waters statewide. Nests mostly along Atlantic coast, especially from Volusia to Miami-Dade County, with a few nests in Keys and on southwestern and western panhandle coasts. Areas known to be especially important to young green turtles include Gulf coast of Citrus and Levy counties, Indian River Lagoon, shallow hard bottom along southeastern coast, and Florida Bay.

Range-wide Distribution: Tropical and subtropical marine waters worldwide. In the eastern U.S., largely restricted to Florida, although may wander as far north as Massachusetts.

Conservation Status: Some nesting beaches are on military, state, federal, and private conservation lands on both Atlantic and Gulf coasts. State-designated aquatic preserves partially protect some feeding and developmental habitat.

Protection and Management: Protect beaches and adjacent uplands statewide from development and coastal armoring. Protect estuaries and coastal waters from pollution, dumping of entangling debris, dredging, over-use by boats and ships, and other disturbance. Focus extreme attention on Brevard and Indian River counties. While Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) have reduced mortality in shrimp nets, greater regulation of long-line and gill-net fisheries is needed to prevent hooking mortality and incidental drowning. Enact or strengthen beach lighting ordinances in all counties that support nesting to reduce deaths of newly emerged hatchlings that become distracted by artificial lights.

Selected References: Ashton and Ashton 1991, Bartlett and Bartlett 1999, Conant and Collins 1991, Ernst et al. 1994, Hirth 1971, Moler (ed.) 1992.