

LOGGERHEAD SEA TURTLE

Caretta caretta

Order: Testudines
Family: Cheloniidae
FNAI Ranks: G3/S3
U.S. Status: Threatened
FL Status: Threatened



Description: A large sea turtle with a reddish brown carapace (upper shell) and large, blunt head with yellow cheeks; front limbs reddish brown and modified as flippers. Carapace with five or more large scales (costal scutes) on each side, the first one touching the nuchal scute (small scale over neck). Lower shell (plastron) yellow and usually without a single small scale at its posterior tip. Bridge usually with three large scales, occasionally four, and these lack pores. Two pairs of scales (prefrontals) between eyes. Adults 28 - 49 in. (70 - 125 cm) carapace length, 170 - 350 lbs. (77 - 159 kg). Hatchlings 1.6-1.9 in. (41 - 48 mm) shell length, with three lengthwise ridges (keels) on upper shell, and two on lower; brown, tan, or light to dark gray above and often lighter below.

Similar Species: The reddish brown coloration is distinctive among sea turtles. Hawksbill and green turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata* and *Chelonia mydas*; see species accounts) lack contact between first costal and nuchal scutes. Adult Kemp's ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*; see species account) is smaller, has a gray to olive-green, nearly circular shell with four large scales (each with a posterior pore) on the bridge, usually a single small scale at rear edge of plastron, and a cusped, parrot-like beak.

Habitat: Marine coastal and oceanic waters; nest on coastal sand beaches, often near the dune line, sufficiently high to avoid tidal inundation. Hatchlings use offshore floating sargassum mats; juveniles frequent coastal bays, inlets, and lagoons.

Seasonal Occurrence: Present in Florida waters year-round, but more commonly observed during warmer months when turtles are more active. Nesting occurs late April - early September; hatchlings emerge from nests and head toward the sea July - November.

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Florida Distribution: Coastal waters and beaches of entire state; Florida comprises approximately 90% of the U.S. range. Nesting occurs predominantly along the Atlantic Coast, especially in central and southeastern portions, although increasing numbers of females are nesting in seven Gulf Coast counties from Franklin to Escambia (nearly 1,500 nests in 2015).

Range-wide Distribution: Temperate and subtropical marine waters worldwide. Nesting in the eastern U.S. is principally confined to Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina, with smaller numbers from North Carolina to Virginia.

Conservation Status: Some nesting beaches are on military lands and 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: Do everything possible to reduce global warming and sea level rise that is expected to accompany it. Continue to require year-round use of TEDs (turtle excluder devices) in all coastal waters. Conduct predator control and erosion control on beaches as necessary.

References: Ashton and Ashton 1991, Bartlett and Bartlett 1999, Conant and Collins 1991, Dodd 1988, Ernst et al. 1994, Moler (ed.) 1992.



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