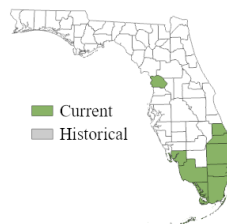


## HAWKSBILL SEA TURTLE

*Eretmochelys imbricata*

**Order:** Testudines  
**Family:** Cheloniidae  
**FNAI Ranks:** G3/S1  
**U.S. Status:** Endangered  
**FL Status:** Endangered



**Description:** A medium-sized sea turtle with a brown, somewhat heart-shaped upper shell (carapace), often marked with “tortoiseshell” pattern of light and dark streaks. Front limbs modified as flippers, upper jaw narrowly pointed as a beak, two pairs of scales (prefrontals) between eyes. Unlike other sea turtles, large scales of carapace overlap except in very young and very old. Carapace bears central ridge (keel) and only four large scales (costal scutes) on each side, the first not touching the nuchal (small scale over neck). Lower shell (plastron) white to yellow, sometimes with dark blotches. Adults 25 - 37 in. (63 - 94 cm) shell length, 95 - 165 lbs. (43 - 75 kg), record 280 lbs. (127 kg). Hatchlings brown to black above, 1.5 - 1.9 in. (38 - 48 mm) shell length, with one central ridge on back and pair of ridges below.

**Similar Species:** Green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*; see species account) also has four pairs of costals and lacks costal-nuchal contact, but has non-overlapping carapacial scales and only one long pair of prefrontal scales between eyes; jaws are U-shaped rather than sharply pointed, and bear small ridges along inner surfaces. Loggerhead and Kemp’s ridley (*Caretta caretta* and *Lepidochelys kempii*; see species accounts) have five or more costal scales on each side, the first touching the nuchal.

**Habitat:** Marine coastal and oceanic waters, commonly associated with coral reefs, keys, and mangroves. Nests on coastal sand beaches, often in vegetation.

**Seasonal Occurrence:** Present year-round in southern Florida. Nests late spring through fall; hatchlings emerge late summer and fall.

**Florida Distribution:** Coastal waters of Florida Keys and southern peninsula.

**Range-wide Distribution:** Tropical and subtropical marine waters worldwide. In

## Hawksbill Sea Turtle

*Eretmochelys imbricata*

U.S., principally Florida.

**Conservation Status:** Some small island nesting beaches are on federal land, especially Key West National Wildlife Refuge.

**Protection and Management:** Strongly regulate marine/coastal pollution, including from plastics and oil drilling; require year-round use of TEDs (turtle excluder devices).

**References:** Ashton and Ashton 1991, Bartlett and Bartlett 1999, Conant and Collins 1991, Ernst et al. 1994, Meylan 1999, Meylan and Donnelly 1999, Moler (ed.) 1992, Witzell 1983.



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