

Pacific Costa Rican Turtle`s

OLIVE RIDLEY (*Lepidochelys olivacea*):

The Olive Ridley is the smallest of the sea turtles. Adults measure 55 to 70cm in carapace length and weigh between 35 and 45 kilos.

They reach sexual maturity when 10 to 15 years old and probably live to be 50 or 60. Nevertheless they are sexually active for no more than 21 years. The females usually nest every two years. However, they sometimes nest every three years and sometimes every year. A single turtle can nest three times in a



season with intervals of 17 to 28 days. The nesting season is from June to December. Olive Ridleys also nest on beaches in Mexico, Nicaragua, Honduras, Panama, Colombia and are found in the Pacific and Indian oceans.

The average depth of their nests is approximately 45cm and the average number of eggs per nest is approximately 105. Eggs incubate in the nests from 46 to 65 days. Hatchlings measure from 2.5 to 4cm in carapace length.

In Spanish the name for Olive Ridleys is tortuga lora which translates directly as parrot turtle. They are called this because their beaks resemble a parrot's beak. They are called Olive Ridleys in English because the color of their shells is olive green. These turtles are omnivores and eat crustaceans, mollusks, fish and some marine vegetation.

Olive Ridleys especially like to float at or near the surface of the water to warm themselves. In fact the shape of their carapace facilitates absorption of the sun's rays. They can dive for up to 30 minutes to depths of 200m.

Only two species of sea turtles the Kemp Ridley and the Olive Ridley perform the phenomenon known as "arribada." This occurs when thousands of turtles arrive to nest at one beach at the same time during three or four days especially when the moon is waning. In Costa Rica there are two beaches, Ostional and Nancite, where Olive Ridley arribadas occur. Both are in the Guanacaste province and these arribadas usually occur between the months of June and December.

However, Olive Ridleys also do solitary nesting in many beaches on the Pacific coast including: Punta Banco, Caña Blanca, Carate, Esterillos, Playa Hermosa, San Miguel,

Nosara and Mata Palo. It has been confirmed that some of the Olive Ridleys that nest in Costa Rica migrate to Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru.

Olive Ridleys, like other sea turtles, are in danger of extinction. One of the reasons is the consumption of turtle eggs by humans and animals. Another reason is accidental capture by commercial fishing fleets. These turtles feed on shrimp and are caught in shrimp nets and as they are only able to hold their breath for 15-30 minutes they drown. They are also accidentally captured on hooks used by commercial longliners.

BLACK TURTLE (*Chelonia mydas agassizi*)

The Black turtle, also known as Pacific Green turtle has a carapace of 80 to 100 cm in length and can weigh up to 100 kg.

Black turtles reach sexual maturity when they are 16-25 years old. The females nest every two or three years. A single female can nest up to three times per season with an interval of 12 to 14 days. The nesting season for Black turtles is from September to March.



Nests are approximately 50cm deep. The number of eggs per nest ranges from 65 to 87. Eggs incubate in the nests on average 42 to 62 days...These turtles nest on the Pacific coast of Costa Rica on beaches such as Naranjo, Cabuyal, Carate and Rio Oro among others.

Las tortugas negras son principalmente herbívoras, se alimentan de algas. Estas tortugas realizan largas travesías y pueden encontrarse tortugas marcadas en México, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica y Colombia.

Black turtles are for the most part herbivores and feed on algae. They are found in Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Colombia.

Black turtles are also endangered principally due to consumption of their meat. They are also affected because of consumption of their eggs and in addition they too are captured accidentally by commercial fishing fleets. During the last three years, dozens of dead Black turtles have washed up Pacific beaches in Costa Rica. They have had injuries on their abdomens, or evidence of capture in nets and on hooks.

HAWKSBILL TURTLE (*Eretmochelys imbricata*)

The Hawksbill turtle has a carapace length of 70 to 95cm and weighs between 42 and 77kg.

Females nest every two or three years and in a single season can nest up to five times in intervals of 14 to 16 days. The nesting season on the Pacific coast is May to January.

The average number of eggs in each nest is 160. Eggs incubate for 47 to 75 days. The average nest depth is 40 cm. Hatchlings have 3.8 to 4.5 cm carapace length. Hawksbills feed mostly on marine sponges but also consume other invertebrates and algae.

Hawksbills are near extinction because their beautiful shells are used for different products and to obtain the shell the turtle must be killed. Their eggs are also consumed by humans.



LEATHERBACK TURTLE (*Dermochelys coriacea*)

The Leatherback sea turtle is the largest reptile on the planet and the largest sea turtle. These turtles are found in the Atlantic and the Pacific. In general, the Pacific Leatherbacks are slightly smaller. They weight between 300 – 400 kilograms and have an average carapace length between 1.4 and 1.8 meters.



Leatherbacks reach sexual maturity after 10 years. Females nest every two or three years and are able to nest up to six times during a nesting season with intervals of 9 days. The nesting season on Pacific beaches lasts from September to March.

The average number of eggs per Leatherback nest is between 80 and 90 with approximately 30 infertile eggs. Average depth of nests is 75cm. Eggs incubate from 50 to 70 days. Hatchlings have an average carapace length from 5.0 cm a 6.5 cm.

Leatherbacks migrate great distances. From their nesting beaches in the tropics they migrate to temperate zones and even sub-polar regions where they have feeding grounds. Satellite tags on these turtles have shown that after nesting in Costa Rica, they migrate south and west to Cocos Island and the Galapagos and continue on along the coast of South America all the way to the cold waters of Chile.

Of all the sea turtles, Leatherbacks are able to dive to the deepest depths – down to 800 meters. It is also the fastest swimmer and is able to travel 70km per day.

Unlike other sea turtles, the Leatherback does not have a carapace of bone and scales. Rather their carapace is cartilage, is rich in oil, with bony plates and covered with skin that is very dark in color and has white spots. The skin of the adult turtles is smooth and lacks scales. Leatherbacks are the only turtles capable of regulating the body temperature, maintaining their body temperature above that of surrounding waters. This allows them to survive in cold waters where they have feeding grounds. Their diet is very specialized. They feed strictly on jelly fish.

Leatherbacks' most important nesting beaches are found in Mexico, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Unfortunately Leatherbacks are disappearing at alarming rates. Playa Grande, in the Leatherback National Park in Costa Rica, is the most important Leatherback nesting beach on the Pacific, yet numbers of nesting turtles has plummeted. Optimistic estimates put the number of remaining Leatherbacks world wide at 30,000. Pacific Leatherbacks are showing the greatest decline and it is estimated that only 3,000 females are left. This species could be extinct within 15 years if something is not done to stop the decline.