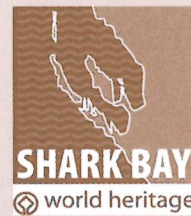
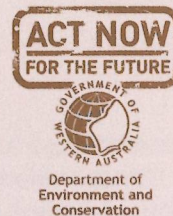


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Shark Bay World Heritage Notes



ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION DISTRICT OFFICE, DENHAM, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

MARINE TURTLES

It has been estimated that the waters of the Shark Bay World Heritage Area support at least 6000 marine turtles. Some of these turtles are permanent residents but many may visit periodically for breeding or foraging.

Green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) are at their southern breeding limit in Shark Bay yet they are the most abundant species in the area and are most commonly seen from boats. Shark bay supports WA's largest aggregation of breeding loggerhead turtles (*Caretta caretta*) which are considered the most endangered turtle species to nest in the Australian region. Leatherback turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*) and hawksbill turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) may be seen occasionally.

Breeding adult turtles may be seen gathering from the end of July, although the main breeding season generally starts later in the year. Several weeks after mating, a female turtle lays her first clutch of eggs on a sandy beach just above high tide. Egg laying can be repeated at about fortnightly intervals with as many as 4 to 8 clutches being laid in a season. A breeding loggerhead female lays around one hundred eggs per clutch. Individual female loggerhead and green turtles don't breed every year but generally at 2 to 8 year intervals.

Turtle eggs usually incubate for 7 to 12 weeks depending on the sand temperature. The sex of the hatchlings is also influenced by sand temperature. Hatchlings start emerging from their beach nests at night towards the end of the summer.

Nesting and hatchling turtles may be encountered at night at particular beaches. To minimize turtle disturbance, turtle observers should comply with the following guidelines.

- Do not approach or shine light on a turtle leaving the water or moving up the beach.
- When a turtle has dug her nest and begun laying, she can be approached quietly.
- Always approach turtles from behind so they don't see you coming.
- Turtles which have begun to lay can be observed with soft lights but avoid making noise or sudden movements.
- When hatchlings are emerging, ensure that there are no bright lights in the vicinity as this will distract them from their rush to the sea and increase their risk of mortality.

Loggerhead turtles nest predominately on Dirk Hartog Island but some lay on Bernier and Dorre Islands, the shores of South Passage and occasionally at the northern tip of Peron Peninsula. Research conducted, indicates that perhaps 800 to 1000 loggerhead females nest annually at Turtle Bay on the northern tip of Dirk Hartog Island. This is the largest loggerhead nesting site in the south east Indian Ocean basin.

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The Western Australian Marine Turtle Project is co-ordinated by DEC with support from the Australian Nature Conservation Agency. This research project provides information about the life history and behaviour of marine turtles and their conservation needs.

Turtle research requires identification of individual turtles and they are tagged using titanium metal tags which are attached to the trailing edge of one or both of the turtle's fore-flippers. Individual turtles may carry up to four tags.

Public help is extremely important in gathering data for turtle research. Should you come across a tagged turtle please record the numbers and code on both sides of the tag(s) and information such as the date, time, place and circumstances. Forward this information to the nearest Department of Environment and Conservation office or return address on the tag. Information can also be sent directly to the Marine Turtle Project, DEC Wildlife Research Centre, PO Box 51 Wanneroo 6065 or by phoning 9405 5100.

If a live tagged turtle is found, please leave the tag(s) on the turtle. Tags can be removed from dead turtles and forwarded with your information. Prompt advice from the public of finding any dead turtles or sighting turtle aggregations would also be appreciated.

In Shark Bay, turtles are most commonly seen when boating, though green turtles can often be seen from the lookouts at Eagle Bluff and Skipjack Point.

Turtles are unable to avoid speeding vessels and can be seriously injured or killed by boat propellers. Collision with a turtle can also cause boat damage and injury to passengers. Please be alert when boating and slow down when moving over shallow water.

Active turtles can stay underwater for up to 90 minutes and resting turtles can remain submerged for longer periods. When lying on the seafloor a turtle will have the appearance of a rock.

Green turtles are mainly herbivorous, feeding on seagrass and algae. Loggerheads are carnivorous and feed on seafloor dwelling crabs, molluscs and sea urchins. Both of these species occasionally eat jelly fish. Unfortunately, floating plastics and similar debris such as fishing balloons can resemble jellyfish and turtles have died as a result of pollutants being consumed.

Loggerhead and leatherback turtles are on the World Conservation Union's list of species threatened with extinction and all sea turtles are protected under the Wildlife Conservation Act. It is illegal to kill turtles or be in the possession of turtle shell, eggs or meat.

Leaflets which include information on how to identify turtle species are available from the Department of Environment and Conservation.