

TURTLE-WATCHING GUIDELINES

There are a few guidelines to follow when watching turtles. They will ensure minimum disturbance to the turtles, and will help you to see more.

- ❖ **MINIMISE USE OF LIGHTS:** Let your eyes adjust to the natural starlight. Only use torches when it is absolutely necessary.
- ❖ **DO NOT SHINE LIGHTS:** Avoid shining any light out to sea or directly at the turtles. Light distracts them and may scare them.
- ❖ **BE QUIET AND OBSERVANT:** Be patient and avoid making loud noises or sudden movements.
- ❖ **KEEP YOUR DISTANCE:** Approach turtles with caution. Do not go too close. Please do **not touch** the turtles.
- ❖ **DO NOT DRIVE YOUR VEHICLE ON THE BEACH:** Compacted sand can stop hatchlings digging their way out of the nest. Wheel ruts may prevent the hatchlings reaching the ocean.

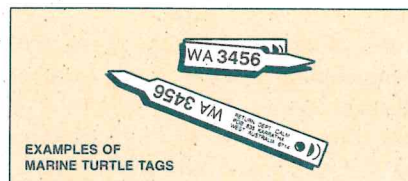
TURTLE CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

CALM has been tagging turtles for more than ten years at a number of locations in the north-west, as part of a long-term study to discover more about turtle populations. Titanium tags are placed on the front flippers of the turtle, the turtle is measured, and information on the turtle's activities at the time of tagging is recorded.

If you come across one of our tagged turtles, please record the number of the tag(s), along

with information such as the date, time, place and circumstances. Please leave the tags on the turtle and forward the information to:

Department of Conservation
and Land Management
Pilbara Regional Office
PO Box 835
KARRATHA WA 6714
Ph: (08) 9143 1488
Fax (08) 9144 1118



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:



Town of Port Hedland
PO Box 41
PORT HEDLAND
WA 6721
Ph (08) 9158 9300
Fax (08) 9173 1766

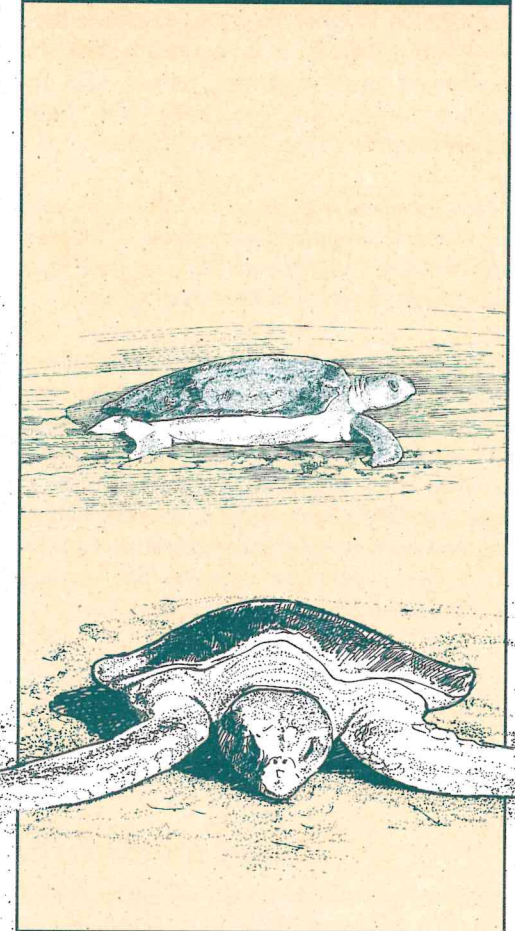


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FLAT BACK TURTLES



DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
AND LAND MANAGEMENT



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MARINE TURTLES

The north-west coast and adjacent islands form one of the world's major breeding areas for marine turtles. Although turtles and their eggs are protected by law in Australia, most species are still endangered as a result of over-exploitation in other countries. To ensure their long-term survival, it is important that the north-west coast rookeries remain safe for marine turtles. You can assist with turtle conservation by following the guidelines.

Many mainland beaches in the Pilbara are used by Flatback turtles (*Natator depressus*) for nesting between October and February each year. Baby turtles hatch from December to April.

Flatback turtles are only found in tropical and subtropical Australian waters. Flatbacks nest every two to four years after maturing at about 30 years of age. Mating occurs in September, and the female produces up to three clutches of eggs over the nesting season. Females lumber up the beach at night, leaving distinctive tracks. They nest above the high-tide line, usually around where the vegetation starts.

NESTING BEHAVIOUR

To dig her nest, the turtle scrapes away any vegetation and then forms a body pit with all four flippers. She then carefully excavates a vertical pear-shaped chamber with her hind flippers.

The turtle will lay around 60-80 eggs, which may be up to five centimetres in diameter. She then fills in the egg chamber and partly fills the body pit before returning to the ocean.

The sex of the hatchlings is related to the temperature of the sand. Incubation temperatures of 24°-27° C will result in a majority of male turtles, while temperatures of 28°-32° C result in a majority of females. The eggs hatch after eight to ten weeks of incubation.

The emergence of hatchling turtles from their nests and their rush to enter the sea can be witnessed from December to April. They usually leave their nests at night to avoid predators, such as Silver Gulls, Ghost Crabs and Terns. Bright lights attract the hatchlings away from the sea and hence increase their mortality.

PLANNING YOUR EXCURSION

Nesting turtles usually come ashore one or two hours before and after the night-time high tide. More turtles nest on spring tides, and when the high tide occurs around midnight. The best time to watch for hatchlings is very early in the morning between one o'clock and sunrise.

Things to bring:

- ❖ a small torch
- ❖ a jumper
- ❖ a drink, either warm or cold
- ❖ a pair of sandals to avoid stubbed toes

Please leave pets and radios at home.

