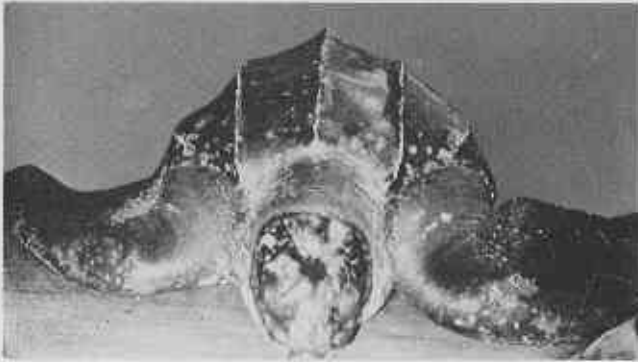


LEATHERY TURTLE AT BUSSELTON

Fauna Warden K. Morrison reports the capture of a rare Leathery Turtle at Busselton in January this year.

A local professional fisherman found the turtle entangled in the ropes of his shark net which he had set in 22 fathoms of water about 10 miles north of Cape Naturaliste. The turtle was handed over to the local Jaycees organisation, who run a large marine aquarium in Busselton, but due to its large size it threatened to damage the aquarium or harm itself, so on the following day it was released into the ocean, unharmed.

The turtle weighed approximately 500 lb., was about 5½ feet long and measured 8 feet across from flipper to flipper.



Leathery or Luth Turtle (Photograph by courtesy South West Times)

Leathery or Luth Turtles are only very occasional visitors to our coast, although they are the most widely distributed of all turtles. They are placed in a family of their own, for unlike all other marine turtles their carapace consists of many small plates embedded in a tough leathery skin and the backbone is not firmly attached to the carapace. The Leathery Turtle is second only in reptilian size to the Estuarine Crocodile, and grows to a length of more than 8 feet with a weight exceeding 1,500 lb. Seven prominent ridges extend along its back and five along its belly. The limbs are powerful clawless flippers, the front pair much longer than the rear. It is mainly a fish eating turtle, and the throat is lined with long spines to help hold its prey.