

Sea Turtle Vocabulary



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Adaptation – A physical or behavioral characteristic that has developed to allow an organism to better survive in its environment.

Arribada – Spanish for “arrival,” meaning mass synchronized nesting, unique to Ridleys.

Asymmetrical tracks – Tracks in the sand left by Hawksbill, Loggerhead, Kemp’s Ridley and Olive Ridley turtles when they crawl onto the beach to nest.

Barnacle – A cone-shaped saltwater shellfish that attaches itself to the shells of sea turtles and other hard surfaces
Camouflage – A means of concealment or blending in with natural surroundings.

Berm crest – The seaward limit of the berm, usually the highest spot on a coastal berm.

Biodegradable – Able to decompose naturally.

Bycatch – Animals caught unintentionally by fishing gear.

Camouflage – A means of concealment or blending in with natural surroundings.

Carapace – The top (dorsal) part of the turtle’s shell, usually covered by scutes.

Carnivore – A meat eating animal.

Cheloniid – In biological classification, the family which contains the sea turtle genera.

Classification – The grouping of organisms into categories based on shared characteristics.

Clutch – A group of eggs laid in a single nest.

Cold-blooded – Having a body temperature that varies with the external temperature (ectothermic).

Conservation – The protection and management of natural resources.

Crawl – The tracks a sea turtle makes, or the act of a turtle moving on the beach.

Current – A large body of water or portion of air that is moving in a certain direction.

Dichotomous Key – A key used to identify a plant or animal in which each stage presents descriptions of two distinguishing characters, with a direction to another stage in the key, until the species is identified.

Dorsal – Top or upperside. The dorsal part of a sea turtle shell is the carapace.

Endangered Species – A species that verges on extinction in all or part of its range.

Entangle – To become caught by fishing gear or other marine debris, often resulting in death.

Flippers – A broad, flat limb used for swimming. The front and rear flippers of sea turtles are attached to well-developed muscles for long distance water travel.

GPS – Global Positioning System: a global system of U.S. navigational satellites developed to provide precise positional and velocity data and global time synchronization for air, sea, and land travel.

Green – An endangered sea turtle named for its green body fat (due to its herbivorous diet). Considered the tastiest of sea turtles, used to make “turtle soup.”

Habitat – The place where an animal lives and finds food, water, shelter, and space.

Hatchlings – Sea turtles newly emerged from their egg shells.

Hawksbill – An endangered sea turtle, prized by poachers for its beautiful “tortoiseshell” shells. Only sea turtle to eat sponges.

Herbivore – A plant eating animal.

Human Interaction – Encounter between a human and a wild animal within its natural habitat.

Incubation Period – The number of days it takes an egg to hatch after it has been laid.

Invertebrate – An animal having no backbone (ex: jellyfish, crustaceans, insects, etc.).

Kemp’s ridley – An endangered sea turtle, considered the rarest. An omnivore that nest almost exclusively on the Western Central Gulf of Mexico in “arribadas.”

Lateral scutes – Large scutes located on each side of the carapace.

Latitude – Lines that run horizontally across a map or globe, measured in degrees from the equator.

Leatherback – Largest of sea turtles, the soft-shelled leatherback lacks an outer shell or scutes. It averages six feet in length and weighs around 1500 pounds.

Loggerhead – An endangered sea turtle that spends time in and around the Chesapeake Bay. Named for its large head, it has a reddish-brown carapace, weighs 200-350 lbs, and is a carnivore favoring jellyfish, crabs, and other shellfish.

Longitude – Lines that run vertically on a map or globe, measured in degrees from Greenwich, England.

Marine debris – Human created solid waste that ends up in an ocean, bay, lake, or waterway.

Mating – Male and female joining to create a fertilized embryo.

Migrate – To move from one region or climate to another for food or breeding.

Nesting – The process of depositing eggs in a nest. Sea turtles deposit their eggs in a bell-shaped hole they dig in the sand.

Omnivore – An animal that eats both animals and plants.

Papillae – The projections in the esophagus of a sea turtle, allowing it to keep food down while expelling excess water.

Photo-tagging – The process of taking a picture of a sea turtle's carapace to use in identification. A sea turtle's carapace is usually covered with barnacles and damage, creating a unique pattern or arrangement.

PIT tag – Passive Integrated Transponder tag implanted within the sea turtle's flesh and can be "read" with a special scanner. These only contain an identification number to input and track via computers, but do not contain data about the turtle's movement.

Plastron – The bottom part of the turtle's shell.

Predator – An animal that pursues, captures, and kills other animals for food.

Prey – An animal that is food for a predator.

Range – The geographical region where a plant or animal normally lives or grows.

Rehabilitation – Aiding the recovery of an injured animal.

Reptile – Any of various cold-blooded, usually egg-laying vertebrates having an external covering of scales and breathing by means of lungs.

Salvaged – Recover parts for use (example = collecting and displaying bones from a dead stranded turtle).

Salt Glands – Glands in the head of a sea turtle that remove salt from the body through tears from the eyes.

Sargassum – A type of seaweed, often found free floating, where yearling turtles spend much of their time.

Scales – A small plate-like structure forming the external covering of fishes, reptiles, and certain mammals.

Scutes – Horny plates that cover the bones of a turtle's shell, except in leatherback sea turtles.

Shell – The hard-outer covering that protects certain organisms.

Species – Organisms that resemble each other and can breed with each other and not members of other species.

Threatened Species – Plants or animals likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future.

Stranding – When an air-breathing marine animal.

Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) – Grasses that grown underwater in shallow areas.

Surf Zone – The area of water between where the waves break and the highest point where the water reaches the beach.

Symmetrical tracks – Tracks in the sand left by Green and Leatherback turtles when they crawl onto the beach to nest.

Tagging – A way to track a sea turtle’s movements, either passively (PIT tags, flipper tags) or actively (satellite/GPS tags).

Threat – Imposing danger or risk. Natural threats for sea turtles include predators, and there are many human-caused threats.

Ventral – Underside or bottom. The ventral part of the sea turtle’s shell is the plastron.

Vertebrate – Animal lacking a backbone. The five groups are birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, and amphibians to reference.