

Marine Reptiles

Loggerhead sea turtle

Caretta caretta

For photo see:

http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot_res/species/turtles/loggerhead.html

SPECIES STATUS:

Federally Listed as Threatened
State Listed as Threatened
IUCN Red list - Threatened

SPECIES INFORMATION: Mature males are distinguished by longer and thicker tails. Little information exists on the feeding behavior of post-hatchlings living in pelagic habitats, but most likely they are exclusively carnivorous (e.g., invertebrates and fish eggs). Juveniles and adults feed on benthic invertebrates and occasionally fishes. Loggerheads display slow growth rates with an average annual growth rate of approximately one centimeter (0.5 inch) per year for subadults. Turtles likely reach sexual maturity at 20 to 30 years of age. Females generally breed once every three or more years. Females may lay clutches of about 120 eggs every 14 days during the nesting season. Incubation time is close to 70 days. Sex determination is temperature dependent.

DISTRIBUTION: Historically, loggerhead sea turtles may have inhabited all the Hawaiian Islands. Today, juveniles are only very rarely seen in the Hawaiian Islands and generally north of 22 degrees latitude. Most nesting occurs in Japan. Post-hatchlings and juveniles live in pelagic waters, but little is known of their specific distribution.

ABUNDANCE: An unknown number of adults make up the breeding population. Some beach nesting surveys occur in other countries but there are too few to survey in Hawai'i. There is no clear trend in abundance.

LOCATION AND CONDITION OF KEY HABITAT: Loggerhead sea turtles are most often found in pelagic waters in Hawai'i. Nesting areas are extremely critical to the survival of the loggerhead sea turtle and are likely in Japan for this population.

THREATS:

- Threats to nesting in other jurisdictions are a problem and are addressed in the recovery plan;
- In the ocean the main threats are marine debris and incidental and directed take in pelagic fisheries. Incidental Take Permits are in-place for the Hawai'i longline fisheries. Another important threat is the direct take of adult and juvenile turtles in other jurisdictions.

CONSERVATION ACTIONS: Past efforts have included a threatened listing by the State of Hawai‘i and U. S. government and resultant ban on capturing sea turtles; and various partnerships with local and national public and private organizations. The Western Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Council has implemented rules to decrease incidental take in the longline fishery. In addition to common state-wide and marine conservation actions, specific actions include:

- Cooperate with jurisdictions where nesting occurs to restore nesting habitat;
- Collaborate with the National Marine Fisheries Service through the nearshore Incidental Take Permit process and otherwise to protect and manage turtles in the marine environment including both pelagic and foraging habitats to decrease incidental and direct takings;
- Work to reduce the amount of marine debris in nearshore and breeding habitats;
- Increase education and outreach efforts, particularly to address threats such as marine debris;
- Continue turtle stranding response partnerships;
- Continue on-going partnerships with local conservation groups to monitor and conserve turtles as well as conduct research and outreach programs.

MONITORING:

- Continue partnership to monitor turtles harmed or killed by marine debris;
- Monitor number of turtles stranded or taken as bycatch to determine if education and law enforcement efforts are successful.

RESEARCH PRIORITIES:

- Continue research on ways to decrease bycatch;
- Determine distribution, abundance, and status of juveniles in the marine environment.

References:

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Gulko D, Eckert K. 2003. Sea turtles: an ecological guide. Honolulu, HI: Mutual Publishing. 128 pp.

Hawai‘i Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR). 2005. Application for an Individual Incidental Take Permit pursuant to the Endangered Species Act of 1973 for listed sea turtles and Hawaiian monk seals in inshore marine fisheries in the Main Hawaiian Islands managed by the State of Hawaii. Honolulu, HI: DLNR. 69 pp.

International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. Threatened Red List. Available from: <http://www.redlist.org/search/search-expert.php> (Accessed May 2005).

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