

FACT SHEET: SEA TURTLES OF PALAU

Turtles around the World

There are seven species of sea turtles in the world: the hawksbill, green, leatherback, loggerhead, olive ridley, kemp's ridley and flatback turtles.

Sea turtles live and nest throughout the world's warm tropical and sub-tropical regions; however, the loggerhead and leatherbacks can be found in cooler climates as well.

Once abundant throughout the world's oceans, biologists more and more began to notice dramatic worldwide declines in turtle populations during the past century. As a result of this decline, various species-monitoring organizations and agencies have classified most turtle species as being threatened with extinction; the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has classified all turtles as "endangered" and turtles are included on the "most endangered" listing (Appendix 1) of the Endangered Species Trade Convention (CITES).



Turtles in Palau

The most common species of turtles in Palau are the hawksbill and green sea turtle, and are the only two species that nest on beaches in Palau. Other species, such as the leatherback, loggerhead and olive ridley, occasionally pass through Palau's waters. Turtles are used in Palau as a source of food and are important in the Palauan traditions and culture.

Green turtles, or *melob*, can be found anywhere in Palau. Nesting occurs in low numbers in Palau's main islands, but is especially high on Merir in the Southwest Islands, and Ngeruangel in Kayangel. Green turtles eat mainly sea grasses and algae and can grow as large as 47 inches long and weigh 400 pounds. Green turtles can live to be as old as humans but wait 20-35 years to lay eggs. They are generally between 32 and 27 inches in shell size before they begin to nest.

Although Palauans have followed many rules and regulations regarding turtles and have tried to use turtles within the cultural setting, local interviews with individuals, fishermen, and officials indicate that the average sizes and nesting numbers of turtles have significantly decreased in the past 30-50 years. Fortunately, experts in turtle decline have offered many observations and suggestions which may be useful in helping to improve this situation.

