

Name: _____

Sea Turtles

by Guy Belleranti



Sea turtles are extraordinary animals. After all, what other reptile lived in the time of the dinosaurs and swims today in every ocean except the frigid Arctic?

There are seven sea turtle species in existence today. These include the green sea turtle, loggerhead sea turtle, leatherback sea turtle, Kemp's ridley sea turtle, hawksbill sea turtle, flatback sea turtle, and olive ridley sea turtle. The largest species, the leatherback, can weigh more than 1,000 pounds. One giant leatherback weighed in at 2,000 pounds!

Like turtles that live on land, sea turtles have a shell. However, they cannot pull their head into their shells like most turtles. Sea turtles have somewhat flat shells that help them zip through water. Their flipper-like feet help them cruise through the water as well.

Most sea turtles will migrate, or travel long distances, between the waters where they forage for food and the waters where they prefer to breed. Sea turtles travel hundreds, and even thousands, of miles during these migrations. Did you know that leatherback sea turtles are known for migrating up to 10,000 miles to search for food? That's one of the longest migrations of any animal on earth!

Sea turtles can stay underwater for long periods. In fact, green sea turtles can stay underwater for as long as five hours! However, all sea turtles must come to the surface to breathe.

Like all species of turtles, sea turtles have no teeth. Instead, they have beak-like mouths. Each sea turtle species has a slightly different mouth based on its dietary needs. The loggerhead sea turtle is a carnivore and therefore has a strong, sharp beak for crushing the shells of crabs, clams and shrimp. The green sea turtle is a herbivore with a serrated beak that is perfect for cutting sea grasses. The leatherback sea turtle has a soft beak that works well for eating jellyfish.

Do sea turtles ever leave the water and spend time on land? The answer is yes; however, they spend almost all of their time in the ocean. Female sea turtles do come ashore to lay their eggs. They dig holes in the beach with their flippers. These holes are the nests where they bury their eggs before they head back out to the ocean.



Sometimes predators often eat the eggs before they even hatch. In fact, scientists estimate that about 1 in 1,000 hatchlings, or baby sea turtles, survive to adulthood. As you could imagine hatchlings are easy prey for predators on the beach, so the sooner they make it to the ocean, the better their chance for survival will be. Sea birds, crabs, and even raccoons may snatch the hatchlings before they even make it to the ocean.

Adult sea turtles have predators too, such as sharks and occasionally orcas. However, humans pose the biggest threat to sea turtles. Many turtles are accidentally caught in fishing gear. Poaching and egg collecting is another problem. Then there's pollution and human disturbance to beachfront egg-laying habitats. Together, these problems have put most sea turtle species on the endangered list. Hopefully, conservation practices will be able to save them.



About the Author

Guy Belleranti is an author of fiction, poetry, articles, puzzles, and humor for children and adults. He also works as a docent at the Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. The information in this article comes from his experiences teaching children about the wild animals at the zoo.

Name: _____

Sea Turtles

by Guy Belleranti



1. According to the article, what are three ways that a sea turtle is well adapted to its environment?

2. What is one difference between sea turtles and turtles that live on land?

- a. Sea turtles have much shorter lifespans than land turtles.
- b. Land turtles can pull their head inside their shell, but sea turtles cannot.
- c. Sea turtles are herbivores, while land turtles are carnivores.
- d. Land turtles are endangered, but sea turtles are not endangered.

3. According to the article, why must sea turtle hatchlings head straight for the ocean as soon as they emerge from the eggs?

4. Sea turtles share similar features with birds. Choose the feature that sea turtles and birds **do not** share from the list below.

- a. Sea turtles and birds spend most of their time on the beach.
- b. Sea turtles and birds have beaks instead of teeth.
- c. Sea turtles and birds lay their eggs in nests.
- d. Sea turtles and birds can travel thousands of miles each year.

5. Which species of sea turtle eats jellyfish and can weigh as much as 2,000 pounds?

Name: _____

Sea Turtles

by Guy Belleranti



The scrambled words below are vocabulary words from the article. Unscramble each word and write it on the line. Please be sure each word is spelled correctly.

1. _____ v e r s c o t i n o a n
hint: the practice of keeping our planet healthy
2. _____ d e r e n g a n e d
hint: at risk of becoming extinct
3. _____ d r i f i g
hint: extremely cold
4. _____ r e s t a d e r
hint: sharp and jagged, like a saw
5. _____ c i n p a g o h
hint: illegal hunting of an animal species
6. _____ s i n g l a t h c h
hint: baby turtles
7. _____ b u r d a n i s c e t
hint: the interruption of a natural process
8. _____ g e m r e e
hint: to come into view
9. _____ r o a t e x r i n a y r d
hint: fascinating, very unusual
10. _____ s o r t i s t o e
hint: a variation of turtles that live on land

Name: _____

Sea Turtles

by Guy Belleranti

In the article, "Sea Turtles," you learned that sea turtles are endangered, or at risk of becoming extinct. Throughout its life, a sea turtle will face many threats to its survival, including threats from human activity.

On the lines below, summarize the various dangers sea turtles face from the time they hatch through adulthood. Be sure to include natural threats, such as predation, and human threats. Conclude your summary by offering one idea about how humans can help protect sea turtles from extinction. Be sure to use complete sentences.



ANSWER KEY

Sea Turtles

by Guy Belleranti



1. According to the article, what are three ways that a sea turtle is well adapted to its environment?

1. A sea turtle has a flat shell that helps it zip through the water.
2. A sea turtle has flipper-like feet to propel it through the water.
3. A sea turtle can hold its breath for up to five hours.

2. What is one difference between sea turtles and turtles that live on land? b.

- a. Sea turtles have much shorter lifespans than land turtles.
- b. Land turtles can pull their head inside their shell, but sea turtles cannot.
- c. Sea turtles are herbivores, while land turtles are carnivores.
- d. Land turtles are endangered, but sea turtles are not endangered.

3. According to the article, why must sea turtle hatchlings head straight for the ocean as soon as they emerge from the eggs?

Hatchlings are easy prey for predators on the beach, so the sooner they make it to the ocean, the better their chance for survival will be.

4. Sea turtles share similar features with birds. Choose the feature that sea turtles and birds **do not** share from the list below. a.

- a. Sea turtles and birds spend most of their time on the beach.
- b. Sea turtles and birds have beaks instead of teeth.
- c. Sea turtles and birds lay their eggs in nests.
- d. Sea turtles and birds can travel thousands of miles each year.

5. Which species of sea turtle eats jellyfish and can weigh as much as 2,000 pounds?

Leatherback sea turtle

ANSWER KEY

Sea Turtles

by Guy Belleranti



The scrambled words below are vocabulary words from the article. Unscramble each word and write it on the line. Please be sure each word is spelled correctly.

1. conservation v e r s c o t i n o a n
hint: the practice of keeping our planet healthy
2. endangered d e r e n g a n e d
hint: at risk of becoming extinct
3. frigid d r i f i g
hint: extremely cold
4. serrated r e s t a d e r
hint: sharp and jagged, like a saw
5. poaching c i n p a g o h
hint: illegal hunting of an animal species
6. hatchlings s i n g l a t h c h
hint: baby turtles
7. disturbance b u r d a n i s c e t
hint: the interruption of a natural process
8. emerge g e m r e e
hint: to come into view
9. extraordinary r o a t e x r i n a y r d
hint: fascinating, very unusual
10. tortoises s o r t i s t o e
hint: a variation of turtles that live on land