

Sea Turtles of the Southeast

Sea Turtles have inhabited the oceans for over 200 million years. They nest in tropical and subtropical areas, and some species have been documented nesting as far north as Virginia. There are five species of sea turtles that are found off the coast of Georgia. Hawksbill sea turtles are rarely seen this far north, as they are primarily found in tropical waters. Green Sea turtles are sporadically seen in the water, although they have nested on Jekyll and Ossabaw Islands. Leatherback sea turtles are frequently seen in late spring swimming to northern feeding grounds after nesting in Florida. Kemp's ridley sea turtles, the most endangered sea turtles in the world, are often seen in the water throughout the summer by offshore boaters. Loggerhead sea turtles are by far the most common sea turtles encountered in Georgia waters as well as on the barrier islands.

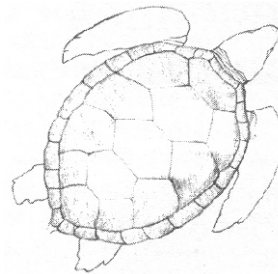
Leatherback Turtle



The endangered leatherback turtle is the largest and most active of the sea turtles. They travel thousands of miles, dive thousands of feet deep, and venture into much colder water than any other kind of

sea turtle. Up to eight feet in length, these huge turtles have a rubbery dark shell marked by seven narrow ridges that extend the length of the back. Remarkably, leatherbacks feed on jellyfish and soft-bodied animals that would appear to provide very little nutrition for such huge animals. Ingestion of plastic bags and egg collecting are reasons for mortality and population declines. Less than 10 leatherback nests are recorded in Georgia each year.

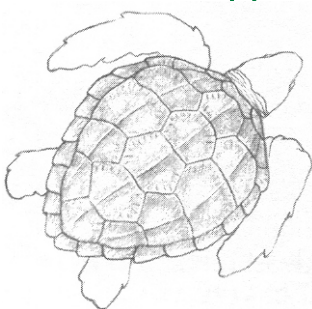
Green Turtle



The green turtle, named for the greenish color of its body fat, is listed as endangered in Georgia. Most green turtles nest in the Caribbean but 500 to 2000 nests are recorded in Florida

each year. Green turtles are considered infrequent nesters in Georgia. Green turtles have been hunted for centuries for their meat and the gelatinous "calipee" that is made into soup. Hunting and egg gathering have reduced their number greatly. Green turtles are the only sea turtles that eat plants. They graze on the vast beds of sea grasses found throughout the tropics. Some populations travel over a thousand miles over open ocean to nest on islands in the mid-Atlantic.

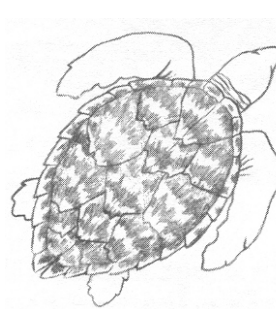
Loggerhead Turtle



The loggerhead turtle is the most common sea turtle in Georgia. It is listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. Named for its large head, which can be ten inches wide, it has powerful

jaws to crush that heavy-shelled clams, crabs and encrusting animals on which it feeds. In the past few years, approximately 1,000 loggerhead nests have been recorded in Georgia annually.

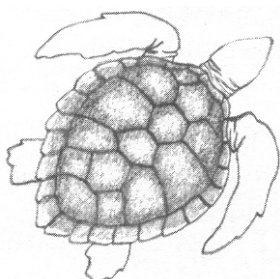
Hawksbill Turtle



The endangered hawksbill, a relatively small turtle, has been hunted to the brink of extinction for its beautiful shell. Hawksbill turtles do not nest in Georgia and are rarely found in Georgia coastal waters. Hawksbills feed on

sponges and other invertebrates and tend to nest on small, isolated beaches.

Kemp's Ridley



The rarest and smallest of all sea turtles, the endangered Kemp's ridley feeds in the coastal waters of Georgia on blue crabs and other crabs and shrimp. All Kemp's ridleys nest on a single stretch of beach on the Gulf coast of Mexico.

For more information about
Georgia's Sea Turtles,
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