

Rare Animals of Louisiana



Leatherback Sea Turtle

Dermochelys coriacea

Rarity Rank: SNA/G2

	1	2	3	4	5
State					
Global					
	imperiled		rare		secure



Identification:

- Most distinctive of the sea turtles, with a barrel—shaped body and a rubber—like covering over the plastron and carapace.
- Prominent longitudinal ridges on the carapace, and very large front flippers; claws absent.
- Neck short and incompletely retractile.
- Dorsal coloration blackish, undersurface mostly pinkish—white.
- Largest of all turtles with average adult carapace length of 1.6 m (5.2 ft); maximum length 1.8 m (6 ft).
- Average weight about 360 kg (790 lb), up to 590 kg (1,300 lb).
- Adaptations for cold, deep water include proportionately large flippers, the potential to exchange gasses through the skin and the ability to maintain its body temperature above ambient temperature.
- This turtle is also unique in that it retains the embryonic characteristic of an extensively cartilaginous skeleton.

Habitat:

- Primarily an open ocean species that may dive to great depths.
- Open ocean and deeper waters of the Gulf and coastal bays; coastal beaches and barrier islands (nesting).

Food Habits: Feeds primarily on jellyfish.

Reproduction: Females lay several hundred eggs each year but only nest every 2 or 3 years.

Threats:

- Although the meat is not considered especially desirable for food, considerable numbers were harvested for food.
- Adults were also harvested for oil to treat boat timbers and as a treatment for respiratory disease.
- In contrast to the quality of the meat, eggs have been highly sought after for food, which is the primary reason for the decline.
- Although protected in most countries, harvest of eggs for food continues to be a serious problem.

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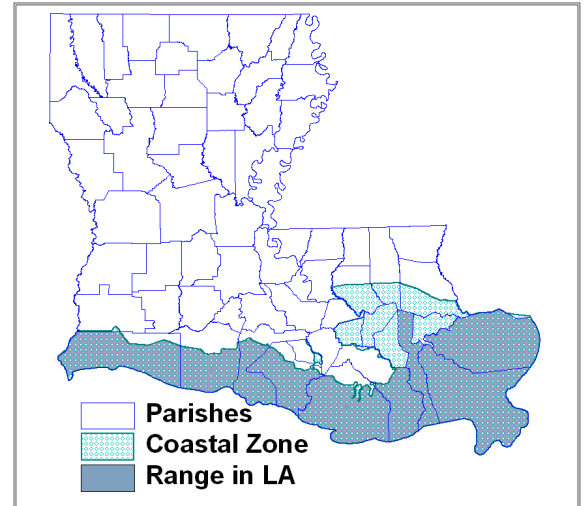


- Other threats include accidental capture on longlines and ingestion of indigestible materials such as plastics.
- Beach erosion resulting in loss of nesting habitat

Beneficial Management Practices:

- Mandatory use of TEDs (Turtle Exclusion Devices)
- Elimination of drift nets
- Restrict dumping of plastics and other debris and pollutants

U. S. Range: AL, CA, CT, DE, FL, GA, HI, LA, MA, MD, ME, MS, NC, NH, NJ, NY, OR, RI, TX, VA



Range based on occurrences in Natural Heritage database

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For more information, please visit our Web pages at

www.wlf.louisiana.gov/wildlife/louisiana-natural-heritage-program or 225-765-2811

www.BTNEP.org or 1-800-259-0869