

TURTLE TIPS Here are a number of tips you can follow to ensure that you have an enjoyable turtle watching experience that does not disturb nesting turtles, hatchlings and other turtle watchers.

DON'T LEAVE TRASH BEHIND!

Turtles can suffocate to death when they accidentally eat floating plastic bags, which resemble their favourite food, jellyfish.

NEVER DRIVE ON A NESTING BEACH!

Vehicles and other heavy equipment can crush the nests and prevent hatchlings from digging their way to the surface.

CONTROL DOGS ON THE BEACH!

Dogs can sniff out emerging nests and dig up hatchlings.

REMOVE ANY OBSTRUCTIONS!

Sand castles, beach chairs, and other obstructions on the beach can prevent females from nesting and hatchlings from reaching the sea.

TURN OFF YOUR LIGHTS!

Only use your flashlight when necessary, as these can scare off turtles emerging from the water and disorient nesting females and hatchlings. Use red lights instead. Never shine a flashlight at or on a turtle's head.

SHHHHHH!

Turtles have sensitive hearing and smell so keep as quiet as possible.



DO NOT SMOKE and refrain from wearing strong perfumes when turtle watching.

DO NOT USE FLASH PHOTOGRAPHY!

Flash photography is not permitted at anytime during the nesting process.



DON'T TOUCH, RIDE OR HARASS NESTING TURTLES!

If you come upon a nesting turtle, leave her alone! Keep a safe respectful viewing distance of 45 feet (15m). Be sure to stay well behind the turtle at all times. Do not touch eggs and hatchlings as they can be easily damaged.



WATCH WHERE YOU STEP!

Be very careful where you walk when hatchlings are around - they are difficult to see at night and can be easily crushed.

NEVER PUT HATCHLINGS DIRECTLY INTO THE SEA!

Hatchlings orient themselves to their environment by crossing the beach.



For more information contact SOS Tobago:
P.O.Box 27, Scarborough, Tobago W.I.
P 868 328 7351 F 868 639 8441
E | info@sos-tobago.org
W | www.sos-tobago.org
Facebook: SOS Tobago

Photos courtesy:
Tanya Clovis, Skene Howie,
Giancarlo Lalsingh, Ryan Mannette,
Michelle Cazabon-Mannette,
Sebastian Schmidt-Roach

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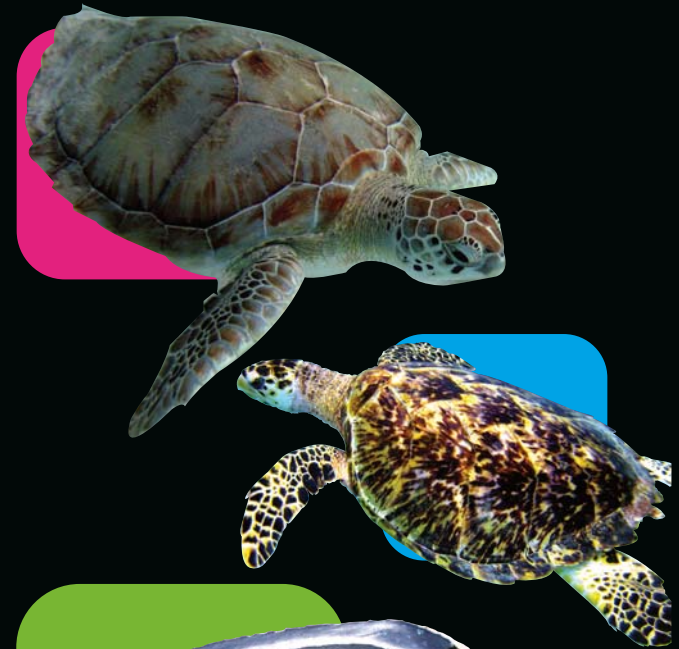


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HELP SAVE OUR SEA TURTLES



Who We Are

Save Our Sea Turtles Tobago (SOS) is a community based, volunteer organization, formed in 2000.



Our Mission:

"To conserve Tobago's sea turtle population and their coastal and marine habitat through research, education and eco-tourism".

We achieve this through:

- Interactive lectures and field trips within schools and communities.
- Monitoring and data collection on three key nesting beaches in the Courland Bay area and offshore in the waters surrounding Tobago.
- Encouraging sustainable economic growth by developing a network of turtle friendly communities, tour guides and businesses.
- Working with Local Government and the private sector to adopt turtle friendly measures.



Sea Turtles

Sea turtles have peacefully inhabited the world's oceans for millions of years. Females take as much as 30 years to fully mature before returning to the beaches of their birth to lay their own nests. Three species, the Leatherback, Hawksbill and Green Turtle, nest on Tobago's beaches from March to September each year.

Despite global conservation efforts, the survival of sea turtles continues to be threatened by:

- Incidental capture in commercial fishing gear.
- Illegal hunting (poaching) of females and their eggs.
- Habitat loss due to coastal development.
- Boating-related accidents.
- Climate change.
- Pollution.



ALL SEVEN SPECIES ARE LISTED AS ENDANGERED OR CRITICALLY ENDANGERED WORLDWIDE.



THE LEATHERBACK

(*Dermochelys coriacea*)



The largest of all living turtles, weighing up to 2000lbs and 10 feet in length; it can easily be differentiated from other sea turtles by its lack of a bony shell. Its dark rubbery flexible shell is marked by seven ridges and allows them to withstand the pressure of diving up to 4,200 feet. Unlike other sea turtles, leatherbacks prefer to feed in colder waters where there is an abundance of their favourite prey, jellyfish. They are found in all the world's oceans. Due to their immense size, leatherbacks only natural predators are sharks, killer whales and humans. Poaching during the nesting season and entanglement in fishing gear remains a huge threat to this critically endangered species.



HAWKSBILL

(*Eretmochelys imbricata*)



Hawksbills can weigh up to 300lbs and measure up to 3 feet in length. Its elongated head tapers into a beak-like mouth (from which its common name is derived). This beak allows them to feed on sponges, corals and other invertebrates, most of which are poisonous to humans. There are two visible claws on each flipper. They are found predominantly on tropical coral reefs, bays and lagoons. Hawksbills are prized for their beautiful shell from which a variety of ornamental craft items are made. Trading in turtle shells and turtle shell products has been banned internationally under The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES). Hawksbills are critically endangered worldwide due to poaching and over-hunting.



GREEN TURTLE

(*Chelonia mydas*)



Green Turtles can weigh between 300-500lbs and measure as much as 5 feet in length. They have a teardrop-shaped shell and a pair of large, paddle-like flippers. Unlike the closely-related hawksbill turtle, the green turtle's snout is very short and its beak is unhooked. Green turtles are vegetarians. They inhabit shallow lagoons, feeding on seagrass and algae. This gives their body fat the 'greenish' colour to which their name is attributed. They can be found throughout tropical and subtropical oceans and seas worldwide. Green turtles have been hunted for many centuries for their meat and their gelatinous "calipee" that is made into soup and they are listed as endangered worldwide. Tobago's population remains in a critical state due to overhunting and poaching.

