



COMMONWEALTH of the
NORTHERN MARIANAS ISLANDS

- Farallon de Pajaros (Uracas)
- Maug
- Asuncion
- Agrihan
- Pagan
- Alamagan
- Guguan
- Sarigan
- Anatahan
- Farallon de Medinilla
- Saipan
- Tinian
- Aguiguan
- Rota

★ Distribution in the CNMI



PHOTOS BY URSULA REUPER-BENNETT/PETER BENNETT



ENDANGERED

HAWKSBILL SEA TURTLE

Eretmochelys imbricata

Haggan Karai Wong Maaw

Chamorro

Carolinian

IDENTIFICATION

Hawksbill sea turtles have dark brown shells (carapaces) with yellow streaks and blotches. Their heads are narrow with beak-like jaws. Adults have a shell length of about two and a half feet (76cm) and weigh about one hundred pounds (45kg). Their heads have four plates between the eyes and each of their flippers has only two claws.

HABITAT and FEEDING

The Hawksbill sea turtle has the most tropical distribution of all sea turtles. It prefers coral reefs and rocky outcroppings in shallow coastal areas. It is also found in harbors and lagoons. Adult Hawksbill sea turtles are carnivores, feeding on a few species of sponges. This very specific diet requirement is unique among sea turtles.

REPRODUCTION

Female Hawksbill sea turtles have not been recently observed nesting in the CNMI. On other islands, their preferred nesting habitats are sandy beaches and woody vegetation. The female takes up to three hours to find a suitable nest site and complete her egg laying sequence. She uses her back flippers to dig a large pit for her eggs. She then deposits about one hundred and thirty eggs and covers them

with sand. She can lay several clutches of eggs in one nesting season. After about sixty days the two-inch (5cm) hatchlings emerge and head out to the sea.

THREATS and CONSERVATION

Primary threats to sea turtles are direct capture of nesting females, theft of entire clutches of eggs by poachers, coastal construction, lights on beaches (from hotels), and driving on beaches. Sea turtles are also threatened by loss of habitats such as sea grass/algae beds and coral reefs.

Turtle meat, eggs and shells are prized by different cultures living in the CNMI. Although turtle hunting is banned, poaching still exists. Habitat loss due to human population expansion and tourism are threats to sea turtles because there are very few nesting areas for sea turtles on the urbanized islands of the CNMI.

Worldwide concern about over-harvesting resulted in the Hawksbill sea turtle being listed as a federally endangered species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Locally it is also listed as an endangered species and is protected under CNMI law. It is illegal to capture, harass, possess, buy, sell, or transport the Hawksbill sea turtle or any part thereof including but not limited to eggs, shells, shell jewelry and meat.

TWILIGHT ZONE

The whereabouts of these turtles hatchlings during their first year is a complete mystery. They may be drifting with the currents. What do you think?

FACTOID!



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