



CHELONIA MYDAS

GREEN SEA TURTLE

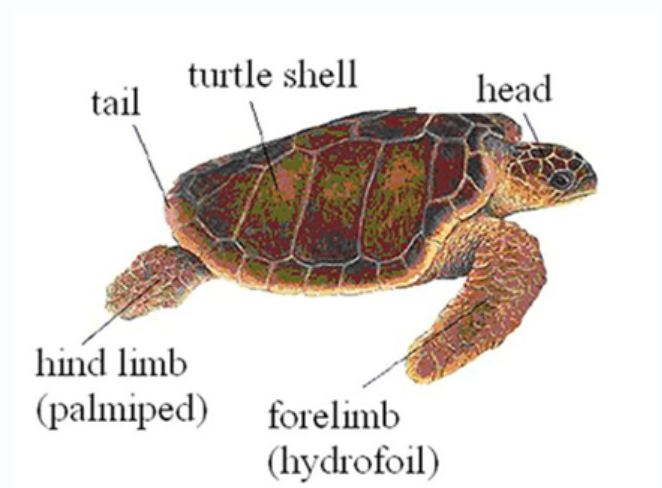
The green sea turtle is the largest of the modern sea turtle (*Cheloniidae*) family. These gentle giants can be found in the subtropical and **temperate** waters of the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans, as well as those of the Mediterranean Sea.

Adult green sea turtles use their serrated lower jaw to feast primarily on algae and seagrasses—somewhat of an oddity among the other modern sea turtles, who normally prefer to eat crustaceans and **sponges** once they reach maturity. Green sea turtles are known to consume sponges and small invertebrates.

Sea turtles have existed for approximately 110 million years, and their impressive hydrodynamic design has changed little since then. The green sea turtle, like other sea turtles, has a shorter neck and a smoother, flatter **carapace** when compared to its land-dwelling counterparts; this allows these ocean creatures to swim fluidly through the water. Its powerful, paddle-like forelimbs propel the turtle forward, while its shorter, rear flippers allow the turtle to steer.



The green sea turtle's aquatic adaptations allow it to reach an average cruising speed of approximately 6.3 kmph, with the turtle reaching speeds of up to 35.4 kmph in sprints and dives. This creature also has incredible stamina, as it is known to swim over 2,300 km when migrating between its nesting and feeding grounds.



Did You Know? The Green sea turtle's shell is made up of large, specialized scales called scutes.

Green sea turtle hatchlings face many predators, including seabirds, raccoons, and predatory fish. Because of this, green sea turtles will immediately travel to the water as soon as they hatch. They continue to swim further into the open ocean until they find a suitable habitat for them to find food and shelter, such as a sargassum mat. The turtle will remain there until it is able to defend itself.



Throughout their lifespan, green sea turtles often become encrusted with algae; this invites a wide range of **ectoparasites**, including barnacles, to latch on. Green sea turtles remove these unwanted creatures from their shells through their **symbiotic relationship** with the Yellow Tang, which is a species of cleaner fish. The Yellow Tang is rewarded with a meal for its service, while the turtle becomes algae- and barnacle-free.



The green sea turtle, like many of the modern sea turtles, is an endangered species. There are a number of human impacts threatening green sea turtles, including **bycatch**, ocean pollution, and coastal development.

To reduce our negative impact on the green sea turtle population, we can strive to utilize less single-use plastics, participate in beach cleanups, and avoid buying tortoiseshell souvenirs.



Did You Know? The early life of a sea turtle is so dangerous that approximately 1 in every 1,000 will reach maturity.

Resources

Bennett, L. 2018, December. *Sea Turtles*. Smithsonian. <https://ocean.si.edu/ocean-life/reptiles/sea-turtles>

Green Turtle. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/species/green-turtle>

Sargassum serves as a safe haven. 2021 August 4. Sea Turtle Preservation Society. <https://seaturtlespacecoast.org/sargassum-serves-as-a-safe-haven/>