



HAWKSBILL SEA TURTLE

(Eretmochelys imbricata)



The critically-endangered **Hawksbill Sea Turtle** is known for its strikingly-coloured shell, with its thick bony plates! Its tapered head and mouth resemble the beak of a hawk (hence the name!) and helps it to forage for prey in cracks and crevices of the coral reef ecosystem! It has an average length and weight of 45 inches and 65 kg, and a lifespan of 30 to 50 years. Unlike other turtles, their flippers (the paddle-like limb that helps them swim) have a pair of claws. Male Hawksbills have thicker tails, sharper nails and more brightly coloured shells!



Hawksbill turtles are omnivorous, mainly feeding on sponges. As a result, they avoid deep waters and can be found floating along the coastlines and sandy nesting sites. This highly-migratory reptile is found in subtropical and tropical waters, along the coasts of more than 108 countries. Like other turtles, Hawksbills use the earth's magnetic field like an invisible map to travel long distances during their lifetimes.

DID YOU KNOW? In the Atlantic Ocean, a female hawksbill travelled 1,870 kilometres from its nesting ground in the U.S. to its foraging ground in Nicaragua!

NESTING HABITS

The largest nesting populations of hawksbill sea turtles can be seen in Australia and Solomon Islands. Adult Hawksbills make incredible migrations to their natal nesting grounds! Males



can breed every year, while females breed every three to four years. After mating in the shallow waters, a female nests several times (laying 130 to 160 eggs in each clutch) and makes its way back to the ocean. 60 days later, the eggs hatch and the hatchlings swim to offshore areas. It is widely recognized that the most dangerous time of a turtle's life is when it makes its way from the nest to the sea, as it encounters several predators along the way!



THREATS TO SURVIVAL

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature, millions of Hawksbills have been killed within the last hundred years for the tortoiseshell trade. They are also directly killed for their meat and eggs. Besides these, degradation and loss of nesting and foraging habitats, vessel strikes, ingestion of marine debris, and accidental capturing in fishing gear (also known as bycatching) are further threats to this critically-endangered reptile!



DID YOU KNOW?

Hawksbills eat toxic marine animals without falling ill!

This is because their fat absorbs the toxins. Hawksbill meat, however, is harmful to humans and may even cause deaths in some cases.

SEA TURTLE 101:

Sea Turtles cannot retract their flippers and head into their shells like the other turtles!

The Hawksbill Sea Turtle is the first reptile to exhibit biofluorescence, i.e., the ability to reflect blue light as a different color (mainly green, red and orange)!





ACTIVITY CORNER

1. Answer the following!

- i. To what class, order and species does the Hawksbill Sea Turtle belong to?

- ii. Name some of the international agreements that protect the Hawksbills.

- iii. What are the differences between a sea turtle and the other turtles?

2. SEA TURTLES IN HISTORY AND MYTHOLOGY - Research on the cultural significance of sea turtles in different cultures. What are the different legends associated with them? Illustrate one story in the form of a comic strip.

3. Trace the path of evolution of the Hawksbill Sea Turtles! On an illustrated timeline in your notebooks, draw and list out the features of the various stages of its evolution.

REFERENCES

fisheries.noaa.gov

worldwildlife.org

nwf.org

nationalgeographic.com

see.turtles.org

oceana.org

ecowatch.com

