

REEF TEACH TIMES

Edition 6 March 2009



Welcome to the sixth edition of Reef Teach Times. In February, Brisbane hosted the 29th International Sea Turtle Symposium, bringing together hundreds of sea turtle specialists from around the world. To mark this special event, this issue is all about...

The Secret Lives of Sea Turtles!

Did you know... that 6 out of the world's 7 species of sea turtles can be found on the Great Barrier Reef? The most common turtle seen on the reef is the green turtle, but loggerhead, hawksbill, flatback, Olive Ridley and leatherbacks may also be found. The flatback (see photos of adult and hatchlings below) is a **true blue Aussie**—it is only found in the waters around Australia and nests nowhere else in the world!

Sea turtles are air-breathing reptiles (like snakes and lizards) and spend most of their lives at sea. Only the females return to land when they are ready to nest—on the same beach or a beach very close to where they were born! Females haul themselves up the beach at night, and dig a nest with their flippers above the high tide line. Then they lay between 80-130 eggs, depending on the species (flatbacks usually lay less), cover the nest over with sand, and return to the sea. They may lay several nests over a couple of months, but may not lay again for several years. Along the GBR, **nesting** occurs mainly between November and February, with **hatchlings** emerging 40-50 days later.

Unfortunately, sea turtle eggs and hatchlings make a very tasty meal for all kinds of animals (and sometimes people too). In some parts of Australia the majority of eggs are eaten by native and introduced animals like foxes, pigs, dingos and goannas, and conservationists are working hard to reduce this threat. Climate change is also a concern—the **sex** of the baby turtles is determined by temperature. A cooler nest will produce males, and a warmer nest females, but if the sand becomes too hot, they may not survive at all.

The baby turtles may take several days to hatch out of their eggs, but will wait below the surface before **emerging** from the sand together, usually when the temperature falls around or after sunset. They head for the brightest horizon (hopefully the sea and not a hotel!) —and swim like crazy—away from the shore and the reef and the hungry mouths waiting there for them. The energy from their egg sac will keep them going for a few weeks and they won't stop their **swimming frenzy** until they get out into the ocean currents (riding the EAC! as Crush explains in *Finding Nemo*), travelling right around the Pacific, only returning to our reefs 10 or 15 years later. Only flatback turtles stay close to shore throughout their lives, rather than spending years at sea.

Hatchlings will eat almost anything, but adult turtles have quite **specialised diets**. For example, green turtles are mainly vegetarian, eating algae and sea grass (which gives them the green flesh for which they get their name); hawksbills prefer sponges and soft corals; and leatherbacks specialise in eating jellyfish!

Sea turtles can live for a long time, but as well as being eaten, they can swallow or get tangled up in rubbish or fishing nets and lines, and are killed by boat strikes and propellers. Only **one in a thousand survives** long enough to breed. Females only **breed** when they reach 40 or 50 years of age, but often **mate** with several males in the months

before nesting, storing the sperm until ready to fertilise their eggs... .. and then the whole cycle begins again!



For all bookings/enquiries please contact (07) 4031 7794 or email learn@reefteach.com.au

“With learning comes appreciation.”

REEF TEACH: 85 Lake St, Mainstreet Arcade (2ND FLOOR) Tel: (07) 4031 7794

Please note that Reef Teach is **CLOSED on Sundays & Mondays** until further notice. We apologise for any inconvenience this causes your clients. Please draw their attention to this when they pick up a brochure. **Thank you.**

Have you been to see the show yet? Booking agents and dive instructors are welcome free of charge, and we offer an industry rate of \$10 to Dive Masters and other boat staff. Why not call (07) 4031 7794 and ask us to save you a seat?

Don't forget you get \$3 commission on bookings! Every little helps in these hard times... imagine if you could sell Reef Teach to everyone booking a reef trip? It all adds up!



To learn more about Australia's sea turtles check out:

www.seaturtlefoundation.org and www.ghostnets.com.au

REEF TEACH

6:30-8:30pm

Tuesday - Saturday

\$15 adults \$8 under 14s

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