

Sea Turtle Nesting

WEST COAST OF THE NORTHERN PENINSULA AREA, CAPE YORK PENINSULA

The beaches of Western Cape York are important nesting sites for marine turtles, particularly the flatback turtle (*Natator depressus*).

Peak nesting time on west coast beaches of the Northern Peninsula Area are from July to October each year - though turtles can nest at any time.

The NPARC / Apudthama Rangers are involved in a range of activities to monitor and protect turtles nesting on beaches within the Northern Peninsula Area.

Threats to Nesting Turtles

The greatest danger to turtle nests along western Cape York beaches are feral pigs, wild dogs and goannas, who dig up and eat eggs.

Humans can also cause problems for nesting turtles. During the nesting process, turtles are easily disturbed by light, noise and movement of people and vehicles - particularly when coming out of the water, crossing the beach and digging the nest - and may go back to sea without laying eggs.

Lights from night time driving or campfires can disorient emerging hatchlings, and vehicles can crush them as they attempt to reach the ocean. Driving at any time can compact sand above nests. Even if eggs withstand the crush, hatchlings may be buried alive, unable to dig their way to the surface because of the compacted sand.

Tyre ruts left by vehicles can confuse hatchlings so that it takes them longer get to the water and increase their chance of being eaten by a predator.

Some Indigenous people harvest turtle eggs as a traditional food source but it is generally only small numbers and most communities have agreed rules about the number that can be taken.



Photo: Kerry Trapnell

What are Rangers Doing to Protect Nesting Turtles?

Almost all major flatback rookeries in Queensland are within land that is owned or controlled by Indigenous communities. The NPARC / Apudthama Rangers work hard to protect turtle nests and control the number of feral pigs in the region.

The NPARC / Apudthama Rangers work year-round to control feral pigs. They also remove lost and discarded fishing nets (ghost nets) from beaches to reduce the risk to nesting turtles and their hatchlings.

During August and September the rangers camp on the beach at the mouth of the Jardine River and on Crab Island to do nightly patrols to tag turtles, monitor turtle nests and deter predators. Some olive ridley turtles (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) also nest in NPA each year. They are listed as endangered in Queensland so their nests are given special protection with plastic or aluminium mesh.

What You Can Do

- ✓ If you have a vehicle on the beach, drive slowly and avoid nests
- ✓ Wherever possible, only drive on the beach at low tide and stick to the wet sand below the high tide mark
- ✓ At night, do not have excessive lights on the beach as this can confuse nesting turtles and their hatchlings - this includes campfires
- ✓ If you see a nesting turtle on the beach at night, use minimal torch light and avoid sudden movements which may scare the turtle
- ✓ Do not allow your dogs to disturb nesting turtles or their eggs



Photo: Kerry Trapnell



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Our Unique Flatback Turtles

All life stages of the flatback turtle occur solely on the continental shelf between Australia, southern Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea. Northern Australia is the only place in the world where flatback turtles nest.

The Northern Peninsula Area is one of the world's most important flatback rookeries and peak nesting season is July to October.

Adult flatback turtles have a low-domed carapace (shell), with upturned edges, which is approximately 85-95 cm long. Flatback hatchlings are easy to recognise with grey carapaces that have distinct black outlines around each scute (scale).

The flatback turtle is carnivorous, feeding mostly on soft bodied prey such as sea cucumbers, soft corals and jellyfish.

Each flatback nest usually has 50-70 eggs and takes around 60 days to hatch. Their eggs and hatchlings are the largest of all the turtle species.

This species is listed as Vulnerable in Queensland (Nature Conservation Act 1992) and nationally (Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999).

Turtle Tagging

The Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (EHP) have been leading flipper tagging activities for several decades to study the migration and life cycle of marine turtles. You can contribute to this important research!

If you find a tagged turtle, write down:

- ✓ The number stamped on the tag
- ✓ When, how and where the turtle was caught or seen
- ✓ What happened to the turtle
- ✓ A GPS point of where you found the turtle (if you have a GPS)
- ✓ Your name and contact details (optional)

Don't remove the tag from the turtle unless it has died!

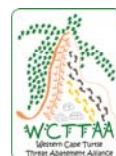
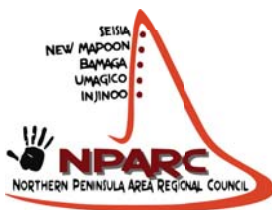
Send this information to:

Dr. Col Limpus - col.limpus@ehp.qld.gov.au or
Dr. Ian Bell - ian.bell@ehp.qld.gov.au
Or phone 07 3170 5617

If you want to remain anonymous, you can pass this information on to the Rangers and they will forward it to EHP.

Please report any sick, injured or dead turtles to the NPARC / Apudthama Indigenous Land and Sea Rangers

Injinoo Ranger Base Phone: 07 4069 3875 | PO Box 200 Injinoo, QLD 4876 | warren.stevens@nparc.qld.gov.au



The NPARC/Apudthama Rangers are founding members of the Western Cape Turtle Threat Abatement Alliance (WCTTAA) www.capeyorknrm.com.au/wcttaa

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