

# Olive Ridley Sea Turtles



The second smallest of the sea turtles after the Kemp's ridley, these turtles weigh between 75-100 pounds (34 - 45 kg) and reach 2-2 ½ feet (roughly .6 m) in length. They are named for their pale green carapace, or shell. They are the most abundant of sea turtle species and like the Kemp's ridley, nest in masses referred to as arribadas. During arribadas, thousands of Olive ridleys may nest over the course of a few days to a few weeks. Olive ridleys reach sexual maturity around the age of 15 years.

## Facts:

- Their scientific name is *Lepidochelys olivacea*
- There are only a few places in the world where Olive ridley arribadas occur (see Distribution below for site). In other parts of the world, they are solitary nesters.
- Arribadas have not been well studied and are not well understood, however, the timing is thought to perhaps coincide with weather events such as strong winds or cloudy days, or with moon and tide cycles. Before one of these events, the turtles congregate in large groups offshore of nesting beaches and then simultaneously, upon some cue, come ashore all at once to nest. Females may remain offshore near nesting beaches throughout the main nesting season.
- These turtles are omnivores, eating a variety of prey including crabs, shrimp, lobster, urchins, jellies, algae, and fish. In Baja California, Mexico, their preferred prey is the red crab which is abundant in offshore waters.
- Despite their relative abundance in comparison to other sea turtles, this species are considered Endangered around the world by the IUCN Red List and are listed as Threatened in the US. Although they are the most abundant of sea turtle species, their numbers have decreased by approximately 50 percent since the 1960's.



**Distribution:**

Olive ridleys occur globally and are found mainly in tropical regions of the Pacific, Indian, and Southern Atlantic Oceans. They are primarily pelagic, spending much of its life in the open ocean, but may also inhabit continental shelf areas and venture into bays and estuaries. Arribadas occur in Mexico, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Australia, parts of Africa, and a few beaches along the coast of India. Worldwide, they nest in approximately 40 countries.

**Major Threats:**

Major threats include degradation of nesting beaches, particularly in India. Many of their nesting beaches are being destroyed by coastal development and subsequent erosion. Currently, construction of a port in the state of Orissa in India, is under debate. This large industrial port, however, is just one of 30 new ports planned for the Indian coastline where arribadas occur. Other threats include the direct harvest of turtles and eggs for human consumption, and the incidental capture of turtles in commercial fishing gear.

**Did You Know?**

- It's unknown why these turtles nest in arribadas, while others are solitary nesters. Some even use both strategies during a single nesting season, nesting in both groups and solitarily.
- Since 1999, over 10,000 dead turtles have washed ashore on India's beaches each year. These deaths have been attributed to drowning in shrimp trawl nets. Because Olive ridleys congregate in large numbers off of nesting areas, they are prone to mass mortality events.
- In Central America, it's estimated that more than 60,000 sea turtles, mainly Olive ridleys, are caught and drowned in shrimp trawl nets each year.

**Links & Resources:**

IUCN Red List of Endangered Species: <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/11534>

CCC About: <http://www.cccturtle.org/seaturtleinformation.php?page=olive-ridley>

Outside Magazine Article on La Escobilla nesting beach, Mexico:  
<http://outside.away.com/outside/destinations/200803/green-archives-escobilla-mexico-1.html>

National Geographic:  
<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/reptiles/olive-ridley-sea-turtle.html>



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