



OF INDIA

LEATHERBACK TURTLES

Named after its leathery shell, the leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) is the largest species of sea turtle, growing up to 6 feet and weighing up to 700 kg. These 100-million-year-old giants undertake long journeys between breeding and foraging grounds. Their adaptations allow them to regulate their body temperatures to utilize a wide range of habitats and they can survive in the tropics as well as in cold temperate waters. Unlike other hard-shelled sea turtles, the leatherback turtle's shell can compress at depth, enabling them to dive deeper than any other marine reptile. They are amongst the deepest diving air-breathing vertebrates.

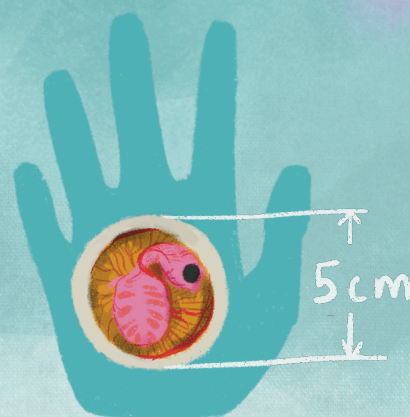
DIET

Leatherback turtles have been known to dive to depths of 1000 m in search of jellyfish, which they almost exclusively feed on.

REPRODUCTIVE BIOLOGY

Leatherback turtles prefer to nest on open sandy beaches with steep slopes free of obstacles. They usually nest every 2-3 years. They typically lay 4-7 clutches each season at 8-12 day intervals. Each clutch has an average of 80 eggs covered with a layer of 20-30 shelled albumin gobs

(SAGs), which are distinguishably smaller in size and contain no embryo or yolk. While the role of SAGs is unclear, they occur in most leatherback clutches, while hardshell turtles rarely produce them. Hatchlings emerge after 50-70 days of incubation.



DISTRIBUTION

In India, leatherback turtles only nest in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. They nest in high numbers in Great Nicobar, Little Nicobar and Little Andaman Islands between November and March each year.

