

HERITAGE MATTERS

No. 4— A worksheet produced by the St. Christopher Heritage Society for Primary Schools

SEA TURTLES



Did you know that sea turtles have been around for 150 million years! Their **ancestors** were giant land turtles that entered the sea, long, long ago when dinosaurs roamed the earth! It took millions of years for land turtles to change, for legs to become flippers and for heavy, bulky bodies to flatten into streamlined, lighter shapes. The first sea turtles looked almost exactly like they do today.

Today there are seven different types or **species** of sea turtles. They live their entire lives in oceans around the world and only mature females come on to land to nest and lay their eggs. There are three species that nest on Kittitian and Nevisian beaches. *Can you name any?* All of these turtles are **endangered**.

The **leatherback turtle** is the champion of sea turtles. It dives the deepest and travels the farthest of all sea turtles. Adult female leatherbacks range from 120 to 240 cm long and they can weigh between 300 and 600 kg. The largest leatherback ever recorded was a male weighing 916 kg! The leatherback is the only sea turtle without a hard shell. It is called the “leatherback” because its shell is made up of a layer of thin tough rubbery skin strengthened by thousands of tiny bone plates. Their preferred food is jellyfish. *Have you ever seen a jelly fish? Draw a picture of one.*



The **hawksbill turtle** is endangered mainly because people kill them for their hard shells, called **carapaces**, which are very beautiful. *Do you know what their shell is used for?* The hawksbill is small compared to the leatherback and is only 76 to 91 cm long and weighs up to 80 kg. Hawksbills live and swim near coral reefs because they feed on sponges, but also eat worms, fish, snails and crabs. *Can you guess how the*

hawksbill got its name?

The **green turtle** is a little over a metre in length and weighs about 240 kg. This turtle gets its name from the colour of the fat in its body. The fat is green because the green turtle grazes on sea grasses. The meat of the green turtle is very tasty and many are killed for it.



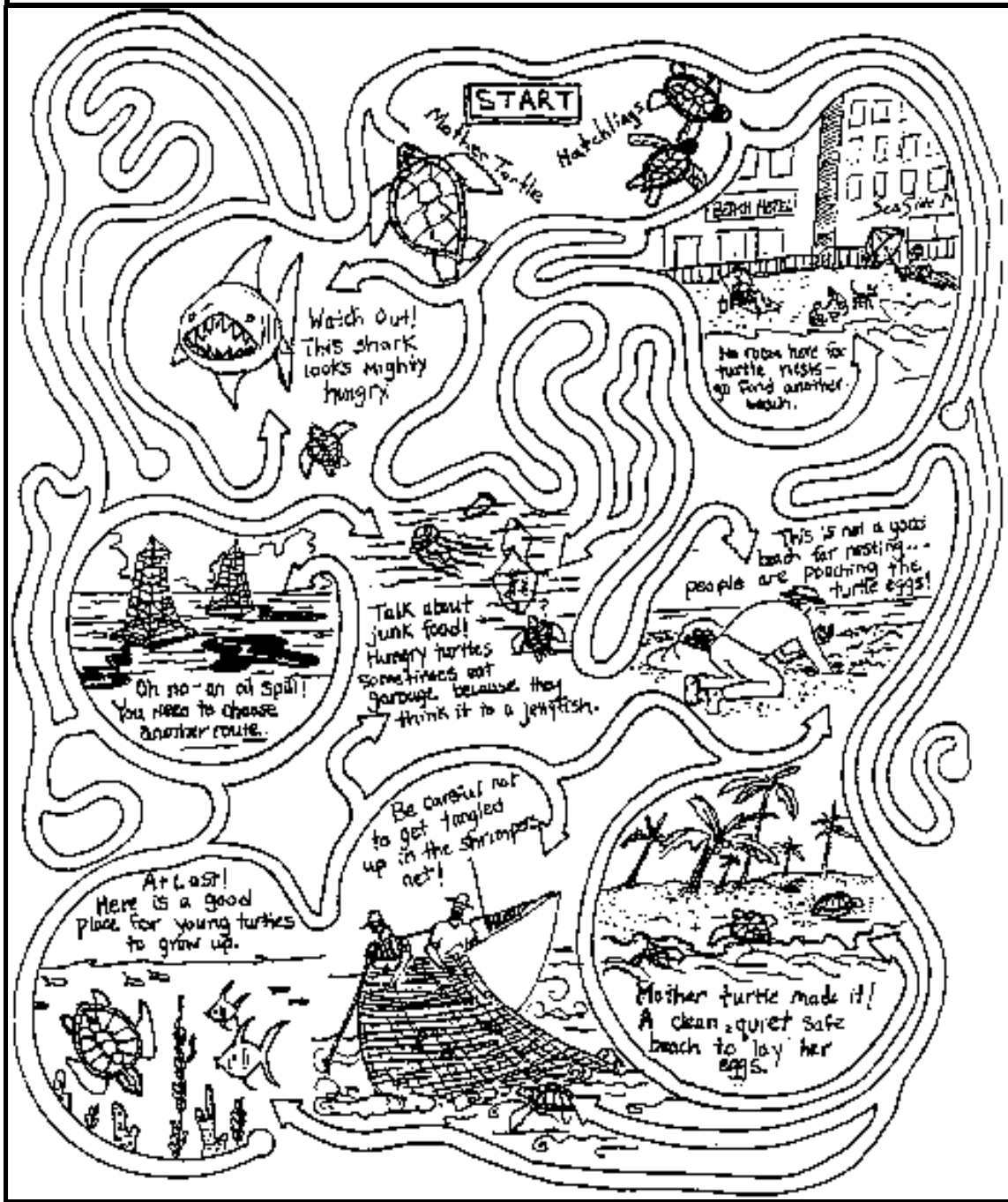
Turtles, like all reptiles, lay eggs. Females come up on to sandy beaches to nest. They use their back flippers to dig deep holes where they lay about 100 eggs. This collection of eggs is known as a **clutch**. During a nesting season the female may lay 2 to 9 clutches at 8 - 21 day intervals (depending on the species). Females return to nest at 2 to 5 year intervals for two **decades** or more. They return to the same beach where they were hatched to lay their eggs!

Turtle eggs **incubate** for about 60 days. *Do you know what this means?* At the end of the 60 days the baby turtles, called **hatchlings**, break out of their shells and together they dig out of the nest. They usually come out at night or in the early evening, just as the sun sets and the beach cools. Immediately they head for the sea. Many die in this ‘dash toward the ocean’. They may be caught by **predators** or die from **dehydration**. Even when they reach the sea they are not safe because they are prey for sharks and other big fish. Only 1 out of every 1000 hatchlings survive to adulthood.

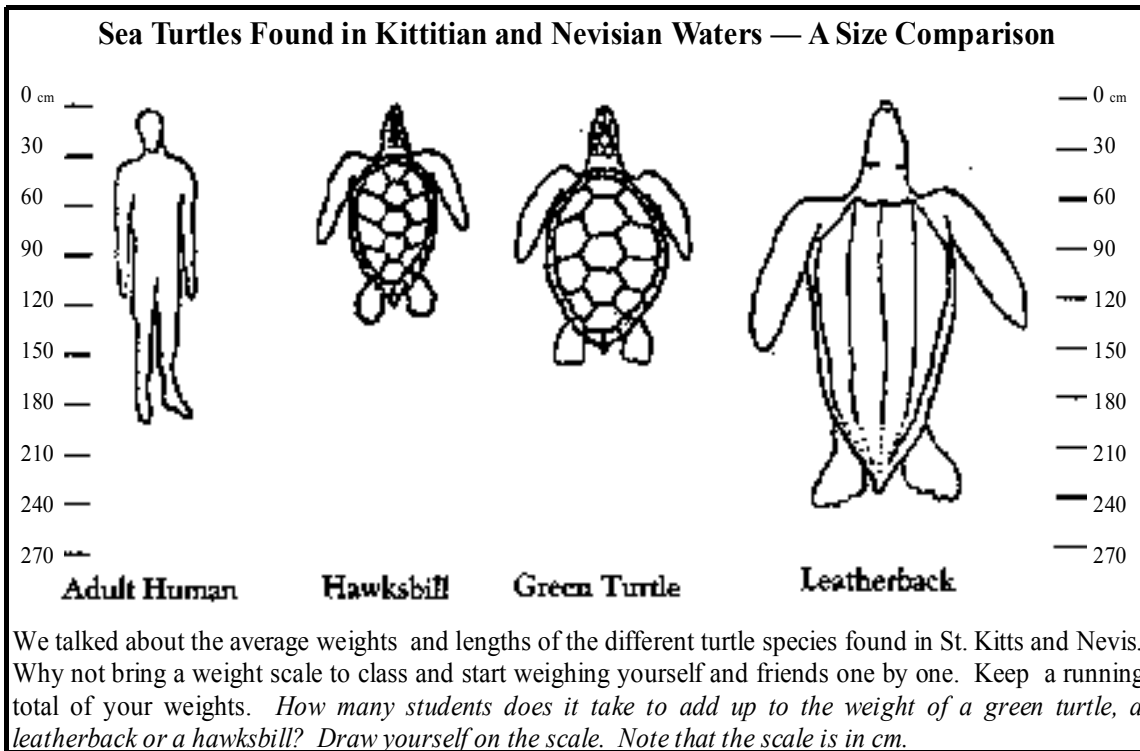


This worksheet is sponsored by the Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network (WIDECASST) and the Biodiversity Fund

Help the mother turtle and her hatchlings find their way to suitable habitat. The hatchlings must make it to a healthy ocean habitat with plenty of food. The adult female turtle is trying to find a dark, quiet nesting beach on which to build a nest. Beware of all the potential threats that can keep them from reaching their destinations.



This maze and many of the ideas and illustrations for this worksheet were taken from "Sea Turtle Migration-Tracking Education Program: An Educator's Guide" prepared by Sea Turtle Survival League 2nd edition 1996



This turtle was photographed on October 26 1993. *How old were you then?* She had laid her eggs and was returning to the sea. Imagine you are this turtle and you have been asked to give a speech to the people of St. Kitts and Nevis. What would you want them to know? Give the speech to your class.

*Have you ever seen a
**RED FOOT
TURTLE?***

This land turtle is not very common in St. Kitts and most are kept as pets. The carapace is black with yellow markings on each shield, parts of the head are yellow and areas of the tail & feet are red.

Can you say 'TURTLE'? Of course you can! But can you say it in 9 other languages? Look at the two lists below and try matching each of the 10 different languages on the left with a word that means 'turtle' in that language from the list on the right.

Language	"Turtle"	Language	"Turtle"
Norwegian	Omsalaan	Vietnamese	Kura kura
Gaelic (Ireland)	Tortue	Indonesian	Tartaruga
Dutch	Turtur	Spanish	Turtle
German	Havskipadde	Italian	Tortuga
French	Schildkrote	English	Con rua

Dutch - Omslaan, France - Tortue, Gaelic (Ireland) - Turtur, German - Havskipadde, Spanish - Schildkrote, Indonesian - Kura kura, Italian - Tartaruga, Norwegian - Omsalaan, Vietnamese - Con rua.



TALKING POINT

We say that turtles are endangered. They are not the only species (plant or animal) that are endangered. Discuss with your friends and teacher why it is important to preserve endangered plants and animals.

Did you know that...?

...Sea turtles are reptiles, just like the turtles that live on land. They have lungs and must breathe air.

...They can hold their breath for many minutes, but they must come up to the surface to breathe.

...There is a land turtle in St. Kitts known as the Red Legged Tortoise.

WORD POWER

These words are all related to sea turtles. Find out their meanings if you do not know them.

- Reptile
- Hatchling
- Extinction
- Conservation
- Incubation
- Habitat
- Species
- Juvenile
- Endangered
- Carapace
- Clutch

THREATS TO OUR TURTLES

- *Eggs are eaten or squashed by vehicles driven on the beach.
- *Adults are killed for their meat, oil or shell.
- *Plastic bags and other garbage are eaten by leatherbacks, -who mistake them for jellyfish.
- *Plastic rings and old fishing line entangle turtles.
- *Commercial fishing lines and nets trap turtles under water so they drown.
- *Beaches are destroyed by sand mining.
- *Beaches are used for housing and hotels, destroying nesting sites.
- *Lights from roads and buildings are confusing hatchlings.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- *Know and respect that the Closed Season is 28 February to 1 October every year.
- *Do not eat turtle eggs or meat.
- *Do not buy turtle shell jewelry.
- *Reduce the amount of plastic garbage you produce.
- *Report all sightings of turtles to the Heritage Society.

Turtle Tales

A West African legend explains why a turtle beats its chest when caught. Long ago the people of the earth were troubled by floods. A wise old turtle swam by and advised them to plant palm trees to hold the sand in place. They did this and many lives were saved when the floods came. And what has Man done in return? Were turtles protected and cherished? No they were not! They are often kept off their nesting beaches by fences, walls, buildings, people, pets, bright lights and loud noises. Many are hunted and killed for their meat, fat and shells. This lack of gratitude makes a turtle beat her chest with her flippers when captured by Man.

Please forward your questions, comments or suggestions to:

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