

Facts about Hatchlings

- Hatchlings usually emerge at night between 10 pm and dawn.
- They hatch about 50 days after the eggs are laid. This incubation duration can be shorter if the sand is warmer or longer if the sand is cooler.
- The sand temperatures control the sex of the hatchlings with females being produced at warmer temperatures than are males.
- Hatchlings imprint on the nesting beach and the region as they cross the beach to the sea.
- Hatchlings move towards the brightest low horizon that is usually out at sea.
- Avoid shining lights on them even after they have entered the water.

Disoriented Hatchlings

If you find hatchlings obviously heading the wrong way either into vegetation or towards lights, rescue them by picking them up carefully and carrying them to a dark section of the beach where they have a clear path to the sea.

Did you know?

Six of the world's seven species of marine turtle occur in Northern Territory waters. These are:

- Flatback (*Natator depressus*)
- Green (*Chelonia mydas*)
- Hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*)
- Olive Ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*)
- Loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*)
- Leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*)



Warning:

- Estuarine crocodiles inhabit some beaches where sea turtles nest. Crocodiles are seen during most nesting seasons at Bare Sand Island. Ensure adequate safety measures are taken.
- Flatback turtles will bite if disturbed during the nesting process. Do not stand in front of a Flatback sea turtle. They have surprising speed on land.
- Bare Sand Island is a disused bombing range. Unexploded bombs may be present on the island. Do not touch unexploded bombs.
- Bare Sand Island is a gazetted sacred site listed under the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority.

More Information:

Some useful websites:

Austurtle Inc.

www.austurtle.org.au/

Parks and Wildlife Commission NT

www.nt.gov.au/nreta/wildlife/threatened/

Environmental Protection Agency QLD

www.epa.qld.gov.au/nature_conservation/wildlife/watching_wildlife/turtles

Commonwealth Department of the Environment and Heritage

www.deh.gov.au/

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

www.gbrmpa.gov.au/corp_site/info_services/publications/misc_pub/marine_turtles/

Towards Sustainable Dugong and Turtle Tourism

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www.dugongturtletourism.org

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Turtle Watching Guidelines Bare Sand Island Northern Territory



Marine turtles are special animals, however their populations are under increasing pressure from human activities.

Nesting sea turtles and their hatchlings are vulnerable to disturbance from human activities on nesting beaches. In particular, lights on the beach can deter females from nesting and disorientate hatchlings preventing them finding their way to the water.

Please help minimise disturbance to them and increase their chances of survival by following the guidelines in this brochure and supporting marine turtle conservation efforts.

How to View Nesting Sea Turtles

Flatback sea turtles are the common species nesting on Bare Sand Island. Each year a few Olive Ridley turtles nest as well. These turtles nest during the dry season on Bare Sand Island although most turtle nesting occurs during summer months in southern Australia. Sea turtles nest in the dunes above the high tide mark. The preferred time is from about two hours before to about two hours after the high tide at night. A few individuals may nest during the daylight high tide. Precautions should be taken as outlined in this brochure to gain the best experience from watching sea turtles nest.

To minimise the likelihood of disturbing nesting sea turtles at night it is best to walk along the beach with lights out unless there are safety reasons for having a torch on. Smaller torches aimed at the ground are less likely to disturb nesting turtles from a distance. Walk along the moist sand away from the water's edge and look for the turtle track crossing the beach. Sea turtles are very sensitive to lights and movement especially when leaving the water, crossing the beach and digging their nests. Excessive light and movement will disturb the turtle and she will return to the water without laying her eggs and deprive you of viewing a truly remarkable event.



What to do if you come across a Nesting Sea Turtle

1. On sighting a turtle emerging from the water or moving up the beach, stop where you are, turn your light off and remain still.
2. Be patient. Let the turtle pass then follow her at a distance. Approach her from behind after she has completed digging her nest.
3. Stay behind the turtle at all times.
4. Keep lights to a minimum and behind the turtle while she is laying her eggs.
5. Do not touch the turtle or her eggs.
6. Flash photographs can be taken from behind the turtle once she has started laying her eggs.
7. After egg laying is completed, stand back and allow the turtle to cover her nest with sand.
8. Do not stand in front of the turtle as they can bite anything that is near their mouth.
9. Allow the turtle to return to the sea.

Phase of Nesting

Caution: Lights and movement easily disturb nesting turtles before they begin egg laying!

1. The turtle emerges from the water and makes her way up the beach.
2. After finding a suitable place on the dune she then digs herself a body pit in the dry sand using all four flippers.
3. The egg chamber is then excavated using her hind flippers.
4. The turtle remains motionless as she lays between approximately 50 eggs for Flatback or up to 100 eggs for Olive Ridley sea turtles.
5. The turtle then covers the nest with sand using the hind flippers initially and then engages all four flippers.
6. The turtle returns to the sea.

Be patient make yourself comfortable as the whole process may take an hour!

Facts about Nesting Turtles

- Sea turtles take about 30 years to reach maturity.
- They return to nest in the same region and may even nest on the same beach at which they hatched.
- Flatback sea turtles lay up to five clutches of eggs each two weeks apart during the nesting season.
- At the end of the nesting season the female returns to her feeding grounds where she feeds on squid and cuttlefish, gains weight and gets ready for her next nesting season which could be as early as the following year.

What to do if you come across Turtle Hatchlings

- Turn off the lights and avoid disorienting the hatchlings.
- Remove them from danger such as campfires, tents and thick vegetation.
- Let the hatchlings emerge from the nest on their own without assistance.
- Don't touch the hatchlings unless removing them from danger
- Let the hatchlings cross the beach without assistance or disturbance.
- Avoid shining lights on them even after they have entered the water.

