

Sea Turtle Nesting

PORMPURAAW, CAPE YORK PENINSULA

The beaches of Western Cape York are important nesting sites for marine turtles, particularly the olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) and flatback turtles (*Natator depressus*). The endangered olive ridley turtle is the most common species found nesting around Pormpuraaw.

Peak nesting time on the beaches of Pormpuraaw is from June to September each year – though turtles can nest at any time.

The Pormpuraaw Land and Sea Rangers are involved in a range of activities to monitor and protect turtles nesting on beaches within the Pormpuraaw Deed of Grant in Trust (DOGIT).

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 to 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.



What are Rangers Doing to Protect Nesting Turtles?

Olive ridley turtle rookeries (nesting beaches) in Queensland are all outside of areas managed by Queensland National Parks so the local nesting populations are very dependent on Indigenous ranger groups to protect nests.

The Pormpuraaw Ranger team works 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.

From June to September rangers camp on the beach and do daily patrols between Christmas Creek and Belurga Creek to monitor and protect turtle nests and deter predators. Due to their 'endangered' status in Australia, as many individual olive ridley nests as possible are protected against predation with aluminium nest protection devices.

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





Olive Ridley Turtles – the smallest of them all

The Olive ridley turtle is the smallest of the Australian sea turtles with an average carapace (shell) length of approximately 70 cm and weight of 40 kg. They are characterised by more than five pairs of costal scales – that’s the scales between the centre row and the outer edge of the carapace. Adults are olive-grey in colour and whitish below. The hatchlings are blackish brown and have a shell around 4 cm long.

Olive ridley turtles are believed to start breeding somewhere between 10 to 18 years of age. Females lay around 109 eggs in a nest and may lay 2 or 3 nests in a single season.

Olive Ridley Turtles are listed as Endangered under both the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act, 1999) and the Nature Conservation Act 1992 (NC Act, 1992).

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!

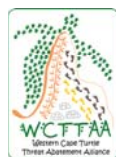
Send this information to:

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 Pormpuraaw Land and Sea Rangers – you can also let them know if you see any nests that have been dug up by pigs, goannas or dogs.

Phone: 07 4060 4155 | c/- Post Office, Pormpuraaw QLD 4871 | ranger@pormpuraaw.qld.gov.au



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

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