

Turtle Hurdles Reading Activity

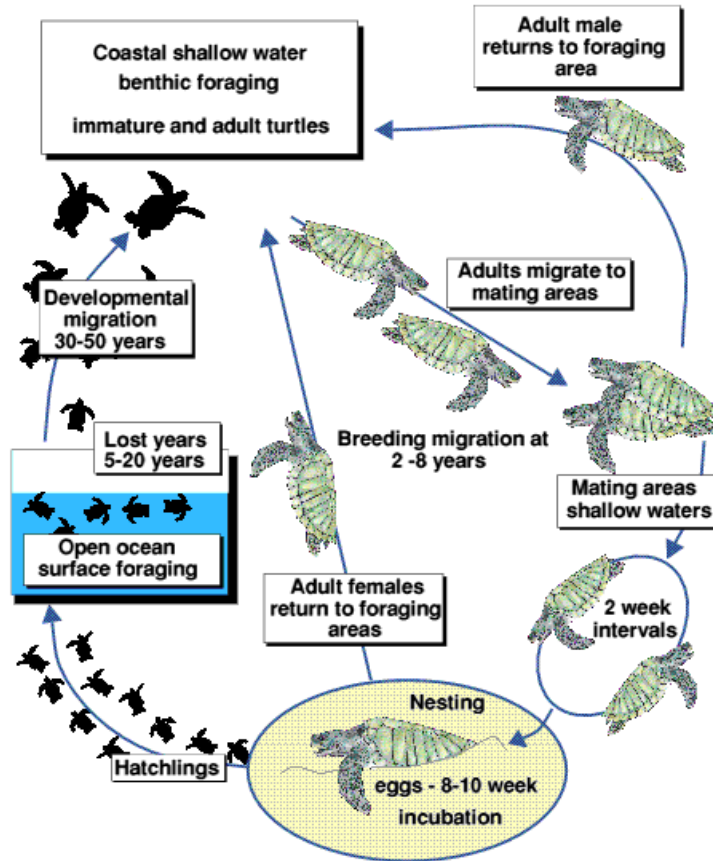
Directions: As you read the passage below, write a question, comment, or connection in your turtle journal for each paragraph. Questions should be specific and directly related to the paragraph. Comments may be fact or opinion, simply something that pops into your mind as you are reading. A connection is a direct correlation you have found between the text and yourself, the text and the world, or the text and another book, magazine, newspaper, or internet article you have read. Once you have read the article, as a group, list all the factors that are likely to have led to the endangered status of the Kemp's ridleys. Each group member should record the responses in their turtle journal.

(1) Sea turtles are survivors of the great age of dinosaurs and inhabit nearly all the oceans of the world. The best known sea turtles are in the family Cheloniidae, which includes the green turtle, loggerhead turtle, hawksbill turtle, and the ridley turtle. Sea turtles live mostly in warm waters and have limbs modified into flippers. Female sea turtles crawl above the tide line to bury their eggs. Sea turtles leave the water only during these nesting periods. It is during this time that the turtles and their offspring are the most vulnerable to predation by humans and other wildlife.

(2)As with most reptiles, turtles lay eggs. The eggs look somewhat like wet pliable Ping-Pong balls. Using their rear flippers, female sea turtles dig deep holes on sandy beaches where they lay and bury their eggs. Mature female sea turtles may deposit several hundred eggs in one season. Once the eggs are buried, the females return to the sea or seek additional nesting sites.

(3)The eggs incubate for nearly 2 months. If the eggs survive predation by raccoons, ghost crabs, foxes and dogs, and humans, then the sea turtles hatch, dig their way upward through the sand, and promptly head toward the sea. Predatory crabs, raccoons, and dogs with gulls and other birds joining typically accompany the hatchlings journey across the beach. Once hatched, only about 1 to 5 percent of the turtles survive the first year. In the sea, the turtles must mature for nearly a decade before returning to the nesting sites as a natural part of the life cycle.

(4)Biologists are uncertain how long sea turtles reproduce and live. The diagram below illustrates the life cycle of a sea turtle.



5)The motives for human predation are based predominantly on the products that are outlawed in many countries. Jewelry, leather,oil, abd food are some of the primary uses. Turtle eggs are seen by some as a boost to longevity and vigor; tens of thousands of eggs are illegally harvested for vanity sales. Evidence suggests that a serious human threat to turtles is the poaching of their eggs from nesting sites.

(6)There are other human-caused factors. Dune buggies may break the eggs buried in the sand. More damaging, given the scope of the impact, is commercial and private construction on coastal sites. This construction may create a barricade that prevents the turtles from reaching their traditional nesting sites and that eliminates many nest sites. Entanglement in discarded fishing gear and plastic waste casts into the oceans is a serious hazard, killing many sea turtles each year. Many turtles fall accidental victim to the nets of large fishing trawlers. Once caught in the nets, they drown. Efforts are being made to popularize special trawling devices that will prevent turtles from getting trapped in nets. One of the turtles' favorite foods is jellyfish. Many turtles mistake human-produced litter of floating plastic bags for food. When eaten by the turtle, its digestive tract becomes blocked with the discarded plastic and it dies.