

# Rapid Reading

1 / What hatch on land but spend their lives in the sea? What start out as eggs the size of a ping-pong ball but can grow up to about two meters long? — Sea turtles! Sea turtles provide us with a lot of fascinating facts to think about.

2 / Sea turtles, which look clumsy when they are walking on the beach, have bodies and shells designed to make them powerful in the water. Their shells are streamlined so they can dive deep down into the ocean. They have large front flippers which help them move forward faster, and they have good eyesight underwater. They can breathe with their noses above the water, as if they were wearing snorkels, so they can stay almost completely underwater. They can even sleep at the bottom of the ocean before coming up again for air. They also have glands that help remove salt from the water they drink. They sometimes look as if they were weeping. Their tears allow them to get rid of salt.

3 / Sea turtles are known to migrate from their nesting grounds to warmer waters, where they are much happier. Some turtles will even cross the ocean to another continent. But how do we know that? The answer is satellites. Scientists are able to tell us about these travels because they track turtles with satellites.

4 / Research shows that sea turtles usually go to tropical and subtropical regions when it is time to nest. They return to the same nesting grounds on which they were born, but nobody is quite sure how they are able to return in this way. It has been suggested, however, that they use the ocean currents and Earth's magnetic field to migrate.

5 / Once sea turtles have mated in the water, it is the female that comes to land. Surprisingly, she does more than just lay eggs and leave. First, she digs a hole above the high tide line so her eggs won't get washed away. Then, after laying about 100-200 in a clutch, she covers the hole up with sand and goes back into the water. After her eggs have gone through an incubation period, hatchlings will start to emerge.

6 / When the little babies have emerged, how do they know where to go? The key to this question is the light of the moon. The reflection of the moon on the sea shows them where to go. But only about 1 in 1,000 sea turtle hatchlings survives. In places like Yakushima, Japan, many baby turtles get confused by the lights of cars, which shine brighter than the moon, and head towards roads instead. Fortunately, there are people watching over these turtles, and some are developing a lighting system which will help them go in the right direction.

7 / Cars, however, are not the only problem the baby turtles face. They also have natural predators, both on land and in the sea. Raccoons and crabs can easily steal eggs left on the beach, and both adult and baby turtles, even underwater, may come across fierce creatures, such as sharks and killer

whales. Also, adverse environmental changes may be a problem. Sometimes, baby turtles die because of sudden drops in ocean temperatures.

8 / The problems that humans cause for turtles are especially serious. Shrimp trawling has reduced turtle numbers drastically, and in some countries, turtles are still hunted for their shells.

9 / You have probably gathered by now that these amazing animals are declining in number. But is there anything you can do to help? Many people travel to the U.S. to help release baby turtles back into the sea. Of course, you don't necessarily have to go all the way to the U.S. to help turtles.

10 / Another way to help is to pick up any trash you find on beaches. Turtles often eat pieces of trash, such as balloons, thinking they are food, but this may kill them. Just by helping with beach cleanups, you will be helping to protect sea turtles. Tell your friends and family, too, what you have learned, so that more people will become aware of this.

11 / Some, maybe all, species of sea turtles will become extinct in a century or so if we sit back and just watch it happen. But we can prevent that from happening. We can do it, one beach at a time, one turtle at a time, and one person at a time. You need to be one such person who helps save sea turtles. Come join us.

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## True or False

1. ( ) 2. ( ) 3. ( )

1. Sea turtles are removing salt from their bodies when they look as if they were weeping.
2. Sea turtles are thought to return to their birthplaces by using the reflection of the moon on the sea.
3. We can't help stop sea turtles from becoming extinct only by cleaning up beaches.