

SPECIES AT RISK

in New Brunswick



Atlantic Leatherback Turtle

Scientific name: *Dermochelys coriacea*
N.B. Status: Endangered

Leatherback Turtle

Description & Biology

The Leatherback Turtle is the largest turtle in the world. It may reach a weight of almost 600kg and a length of close to 2m. Its name is derived from its shell, which is composed of numerous bony plates or *scutes* and is covered by a brown rubbery skin.

Among its many adaptations, are its salt glands, which allow it to survive in the marine environment. A particularly striking adaptation is the Leatherback Turtle's mouth and esophagus, which have specialized spines that are pointed backward and help it swallow its prey.

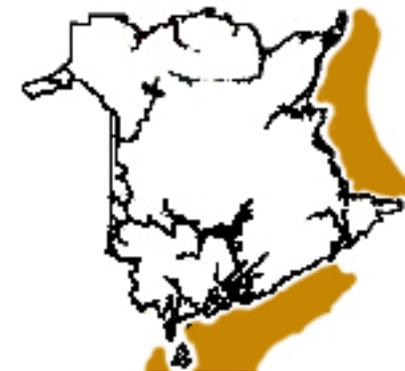
Habitat & Survival

These turtles can travel long distances, migrating between temperate and tropical waters. Breeding and nesting occur in tropical and subtropical areas. The female turtle produces eggs in separate *clutches*, four to ten clutches per season, each clutch having up to 50-70 eggs. After breeding season, the turtles move into temperate waters. Jellyfish are the primary source of food for the adult turtles.

During their oceanic migrations, these turtles are sometimes accidentally caught in fishing nets. Another serious concern is debris in marine waters; Leatherback Turtles have been known to swallow plastic bags, which they may mistake for jellyfish and which can cause them serious harm. On the breeding grounds the adults are sometimes hunted and the eggs harvested.

Distribution

Leatherback Turtles may be found almost everywhere around the globe, depending on the season, from northern Alaska to the Cape of Good Hope in Africa. They are occasionally found off New Brunswick coasts between June and October, during their migration.



NB Distribution of
Leatherback Turtle