

# Sea Turtle Diets

Introduction



South Carolina  
Aquarium

# Sea Turtles are Reptiles

- Air breathers, lay eggs, have scaly skin and are cold blooded
- Top shell – carapace, bottom shell - plastron
- Do not pull limbs inside for protection like other turtles
  - > **Have very large pectoral muscles taking up space inside**
  - > **Use pectoral muscles to swim away from danger**
- Get very large due to living in water for buoyancy
- Front flippers large for propelling
- Back flippers act as rudders for steering

# Sea Turtle Species (7 worldwide)

- Flatback
- Green
- Hawksbill
- Kemp's Ridley
- Leatherback
- Loggerhead
- Olive Ridley



# Sea Turtle Diets

- Sea turtles have a varied diets depending on species
- Prey items can include:
  - > **Jellies**
  - > **Sea grasses and other vegetation**
  - > **Sponges**
  - > **Corals**
  - > **Crustaceans (crabs, shrimp, lobsters)**
  - > **Mollusks (snails, clams)**
  - > **Echinoderms (urchins, sea stars)**
  - > **Fish**
- Can look at mouth shape to determine what they eat
- Scientist can learn a lot about where sea turtles live and how to protect them, by understanding their diets

# Beak Shape and Diet

## Hawksbill Sea Turtles

- Hook shaped beak
- Named for this very hawk-like shape
- Perfect for feeding on sponges
- Can rip apart sections of the sponge using the hook

## Green Sea Turtles

- Serrated (jagged) jaw
- Perfect for feeding on sea grasses, sea weeds and algae
- Can scrape vegetation off hard substrates using the serrated jaw
- Named for eating greens (vegetation)

# Beak Shape and Diet

## Leatherback Sea Turtles

- Softer beak with sharp curved point at end (called a cusp)
- Also have fleshy spines in their mouth
- Perfect for eating jellies
- Can pierce the jellies with the cusp and the fleshy spines keep the jelly from escaping

## Loggerhead, Kemp's Ridley, Olive Ridley Sea Turtles

- Hard beak with bony plates inside
- Perfect for feeding on hard prey such as snails, crabs urchins and corals
- Use hard, strong break to crush prey

# Sea Turtle Diets

- When a turtle eats, evidence of what it eats will be expelled in the feces
- Scientists can look at the feces to see what the turtle has been eating
- Sometimes turtles eat marine debris (plastic, fishing line, tires,...) because they think it's food
- Turtles can get very sick eating marine debris



# We Can Help!

- Don't litter
- Pick up trash on the ground
- Use canvas bags, not plastic
- Be careful when fishing or crabbing – don't leave behind gear



**Leading the  
way to  
connect people  
with water,  
wildlife and  
wild places.**

