



The Leatherback Turtle: an Endangered Species

The leatherback turtle is the world's largest reptile. It can reach over 2 m in length and weigh over 900 kg. Its shell is made of a thick cartilage covered with a tough skin similar to leather, which gave it its name. In our coastal waters, leatherbacks can be seen during the summer as they swim near the surface to feed on jellyfish.

Since 2003, leatherback turtles in Canada have been designated as an endangered species under the *Species at Risk Act*. This species is

experiencing a serious, world-wide population decline and has lost 70% of its numbers in the last 15 years. Its late sexual maturity and the high mortality rate of its eggs and hatchlings contribute to its high vulnerability.

The *Species at Risk Act* protects leatherback turtles: it is forbidden to kill, harm, harass, or take a live specimen. Moreover, the law forbids anyone to possess a turtle, dead or alive, or a part of a turtle.



You can help the leatherback turtle

In Canadian waters, incidental catches in fishing gear are a major cause of mortality for leatherback turtles. Once entangled in fishing gear, in ropes, or other floating debris, leatherbacks can have trouble swimming and feeding, or even become incapable of surfacing to breathe.



Leatherback sea turtle released alive in the Fortune Bay area in 2005.



Leatherback sea turtle sighted in the Cape Bauld area on the Northern Peninsula in Newfoundland in 2004.

What should you do if you see a leatherback turtle?

- For further information or to report sightings of marine mammals or turtles, contact:

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- Take a picture or shoot a video of the turtle.
- Record the date, time, and, if possible, the position where the turtle was seen and send this information to Fisheries and Oceans Canada.