



# The life of a turtle

## Background reading for teachers

This reading gives you the background for each slide, with sources you can check.

### Nesting

Female sea turtles usually reach maturity at about 20 to 30 years old. They come ashore at night, often returning to the region where they hatched, dig a nest and lay clutches of up to 200 eggs depending on the species, often several times a season.<sup>1</sup> The slide uses 'often around 100' as a typical number.

### Temperature and sex

Sea turtle sex is set by nest temperature during the middle third of incubation. The pivotal temperature, which produces about half males and half females, is about 29°C and varies a little between species. Nests averaging above about 31°C produce nearly all females, and below about 27.7°C nearly all males. Incubation takes about 45 to 70 days.<sup>2</sup> Rising sand temperatures are a real concern for turtle populations.

### Survival

Scientists estimate that only about one in every thousand hatchlings survives to adulthood.<sup>1</sup> Artificial lighting is a well-known threat, because hatchlings orient towards the brightest horizon, which on a dark natural beach is the sea.

### Sources

1. National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (2021). Saving sea turtles, by land and sea. [nfwf.org](https://nfwf.org)
2. State of the World's Sea Turtles (SWOT). How temperature determines sex in sea turtles. [seaturtlestatus.org](https://seaturtlestatus.org)

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