

LOGGERHEAD: THE TOUGH GUY

The loggerhead sea turtle's powerful jaws can easily crack open the thick shells of lobsters, large conches and whelk snails to get at the tasty morsels inside – eek! Like other sea turtles, the loggerhead nests in one place and eats in another. After leaving the nesting site, a loggerhead may swim an incredible third of the way around the world to find food!

The jet-set turtle travels into waters as far north as Canada, and as far south as Argentina. Wow!



HAWKSBILL: THE HARDY EATER

This sea turtle has an unusual diet – sponges! "Some sea sponges are made of hard, glass-like needles," explains Neil. "But a hawksbill easily rips off pieces with its sharp beak." Sea sponges are toxic for most animals to eat, but not for this tough turtle. It gobbles about 550kg of them a year without any trouble. The dangerous diet has a snappy advantage, too – few other animals eat sponges, so the turtle doesn't have to compete for food.

The hawksbill sea turtle inhabits tropical coral reefs around the world. Its name describes the hawk-like beak, which is perfect for plucking sea sponges from the cracks and crevices in coral.



OLIVE RIDLEY: THE SUPER MUM

This sea turtle likes to travel solo, but once a year, the female of the species joins hundreds of thousands of other female olive ridleys in an event called an arribada, which means 'arrival' in Spanish. An arribada starts with the females gathering offshore. Then, as if they hear a starter's pistol, the turtles change onto the beach!

A female sea turtle comes ashore only to

lay her eggs. She buries them in the sand and then disappears back into the sea. On one beach in India, a whopping 200,000 turtles came ashore during an arribada!

"One theory behind this amazing behaviour is that there's an advantage to these large numbers," Neil says. "Thousands of turtles swarming the shoreline can overwhelm any predator!"



Like all sea turtle mums, the olive ridley lays and buries its eggs on the beach. Eventually the baby turtles hatch, then scamper into the sea, disappearing for several years. No one's sure where they live during this time – it's a mystery!

This turtle's shell is flatter on top than other sea turtles' – hence its name. Crazy seabirds often perch on the backs of floating flatbacks!

FLATBACK: THE HOMEBODY

Unlike its globe-trotting cousins, a flatback sea turtle is a homebody. This rare turtle nests only on the remote beaches of northern Australia, spending most of its days floating in the water and basking in the sun. Relative to its size, the flatback has the largest eggs and hatchlings of the seven species. Most sea turtles' eggs are the size of Ping-Pong balls, but the flatback's are almost as big as tennis balls. Scientists think that the extra-large eggs help the hatchlings start life bigger, stronger and faster. Size and speed come in very handy as the hatched turtle tries to reach the safety of coastal waters before a crocodile, crab or seabird snaps it up for lunch!



SAVE OUR SEAS!

NG Kids chats to turtle expert, Dr. Neil D'Cruze, from the World Society For The Protection of Animals (WSPA) about the challenges they face, and what we can do to help...



NG Kids Hi Neil! What is the biggest danger turtles face today?

Neil Sadly, it's US! Around 250,000 turtles are captured, injured, or killed by humans every year. In some countries they're poached and hunted. But turtles also often mistake rubbish in the ocean for food and when they eat it, it blocks their stomachs. Plastic bags and balloons are the worst for this, as to a turtle they look like tasty jellyfish!

NG Kids Can turtles that have eaten plastic be saved?

Neil Yes, if turtles are rescued before they get too poorly they can recover and survive. There are lots of hospitals set up especially to help these turtles and then release them back into the wild. They do brilliant work!

NG Kids What can NG Kids readers do to help turtles?

Neil They can volunteer at beach clean-up events and get involved in campaigns that want to ban the use of plastic bags. But one of the best things they can do is to raise awareness by putting together a presentation for their class or even designing a leaflet for their neighbours!

NG Kids Thanks Neil, we'll all do our best to save the turtles!

To find out more about the work of the WSPA, head to wspa.org.uk

