



# OCEAN SUPERSTARS

The fascinating  
lives of 7 sea  
turtle species

Think all sea turtles are the same? Yes, they all have shells and flippers. But while all seven species are endangered or vulnerable, each kind stands out in its own way. Here's a look at the traits that make each species a superstar.

## GREEN SEA TURTLE: THE NEAT FREAK

Green sea turtles have a couple of answers to the question, "How do you stay clean when you live in the water?" In Hawaii green turtles visit a swim-through turtle wash. Turtles choose a "cleaning station"—a location where groups of cleaner fish groom the turtles

by eating the algae, barnacles, parasites, and other ocean gunk off the turtles' shells and skin. In Australia the turtles clean up differently: sponge baths! They rub against a favorite sponge or rock, scrubbing algae off their shells, heads, and flippers.

A green sea turtle can hold its breath for five hours, during that time its heart beats only once every nine minutes.



## KEMP'S RIDLEY: THE LITTLE ONE

The Kemp's ridley may be the smallest sea turtle, but that doesn't mean it's tiny. The 20- to 100-pound adult reptile weighs more than many 10-year-old kids. Its shield-shaped shell is about the size of a car tire. This

"little" turtle is also speedy. Most sea turtles take two to four hours to dig a nest, then lay and bury eggs. "But Kemp's ridleys are very quick," says sea turtle expert Tasha Metz. "It takes them only about 50 minutes to complete the whole process."

A fisherman named Richard Kemp was the first to submit this turtle to scientists for identification, so the sea turtle was named after him.

## LEATHERBACK: THE MEGA-TURTLE

The leatherback is a giant among reptiles. Its leathery shell, which can be six feet long and four feet wide, is about as big as a door. Tipping the scales at an average of 1,500 pounds, these

mega-turtles weigh more than any other sea turtle. It would take six professional football players to weigh as much as one leatherback. Its massive size doesn't slow it down, though. A leatherback can swim as fast as a bottlenose dolphin.

