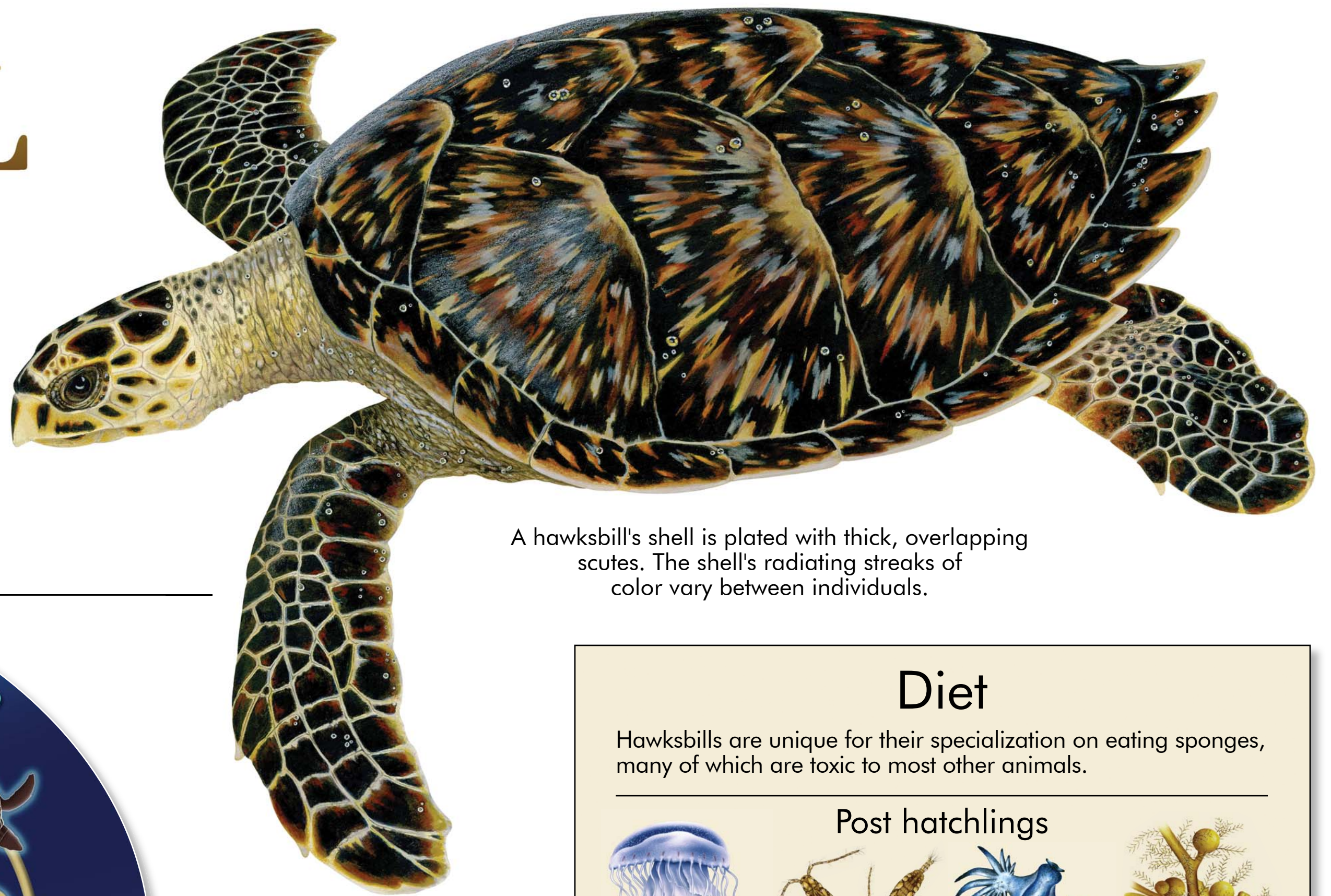


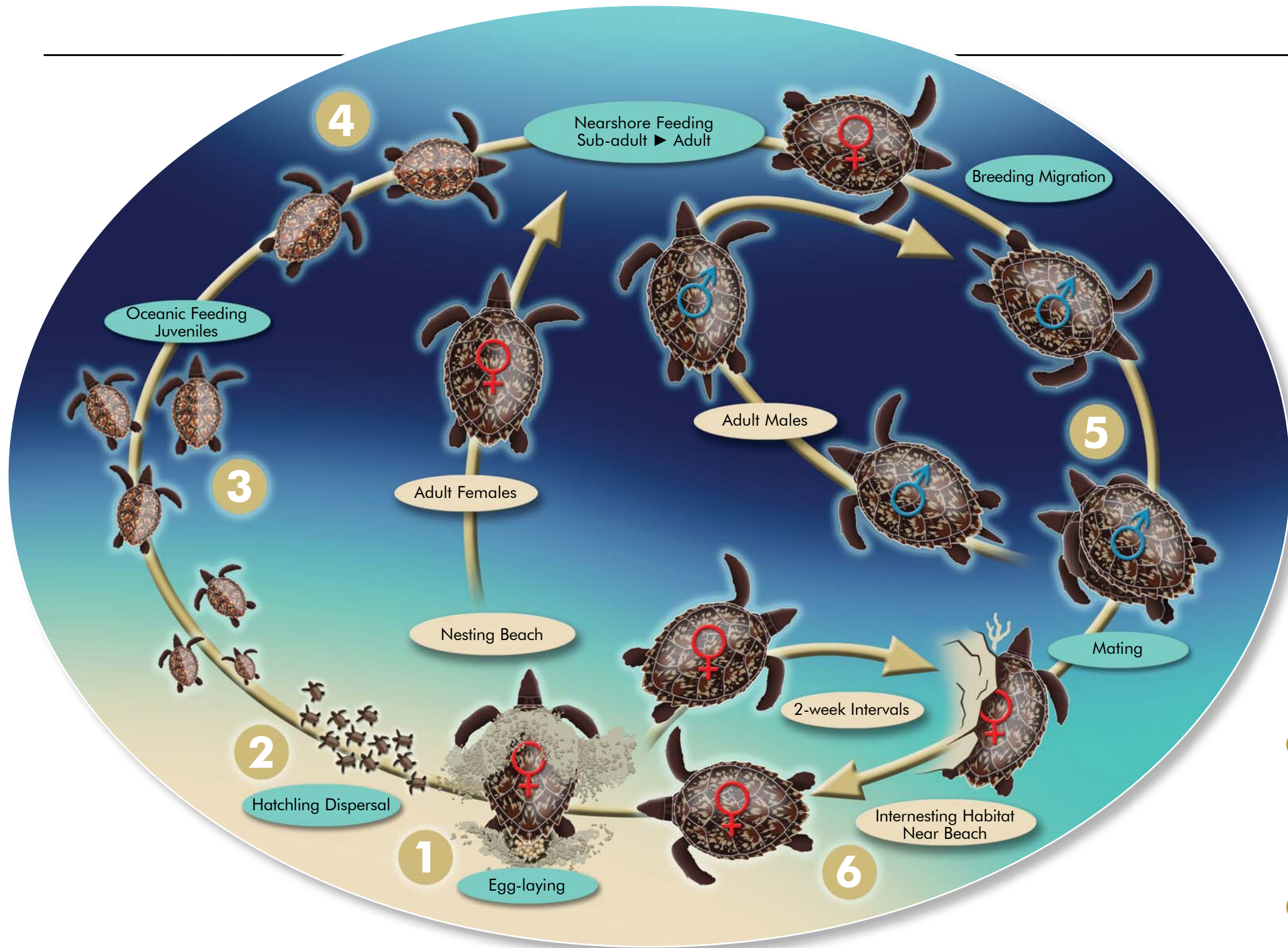
HAWKSBILL TURTLE

Eretmochelys imbricata

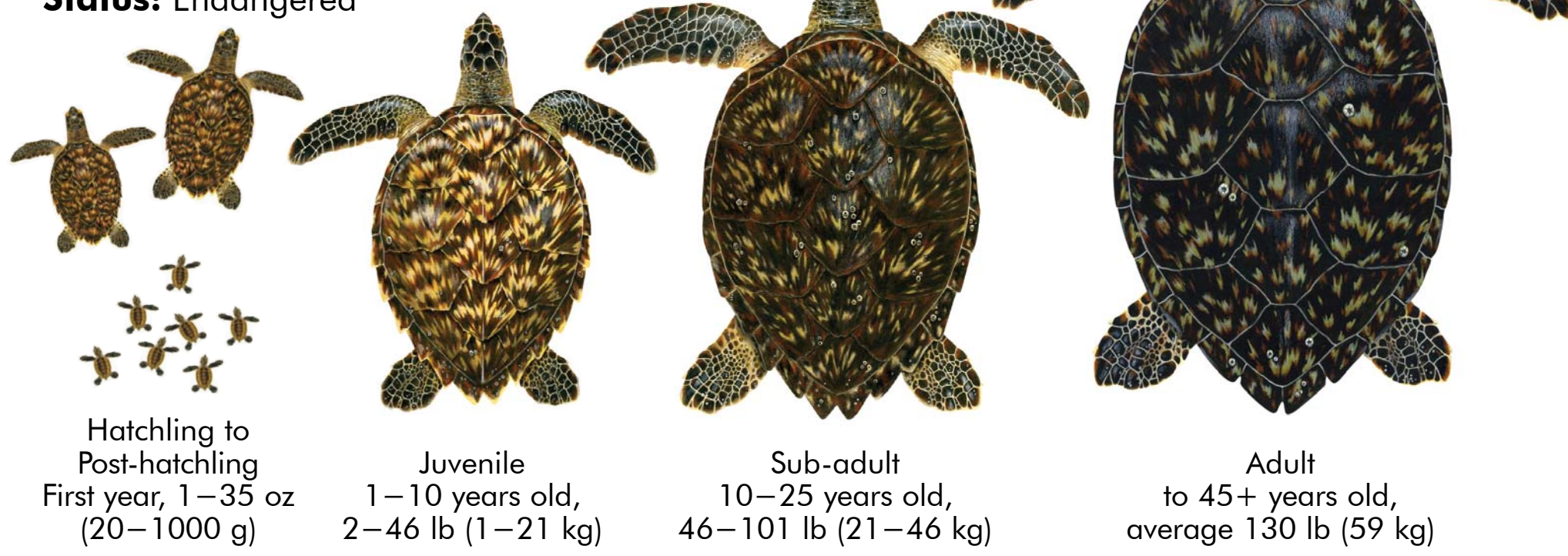
This sea turtle of tropical reefs has become rare. Although the hawksbill's center of abundance in the Atlantic is the Caribbean Sea, significant numbers of juvenile hawksbills feed on reefs in southern Florida and the Keys. Hawksbills are named for their narrow, slightly hooked beak.



A hawksbill's shell is plated with thick, overlapping scutes. The shell's radiating streaks of color vary between individuals.



Nesting/hatching season: Varies by location
Adult shell length: 28–35 in (71–89 cm)
Adult weight: 101–154 lb (46–71 kg)
Age at maturity: Approximately 25 years
Status: Endangered



Life Cycle

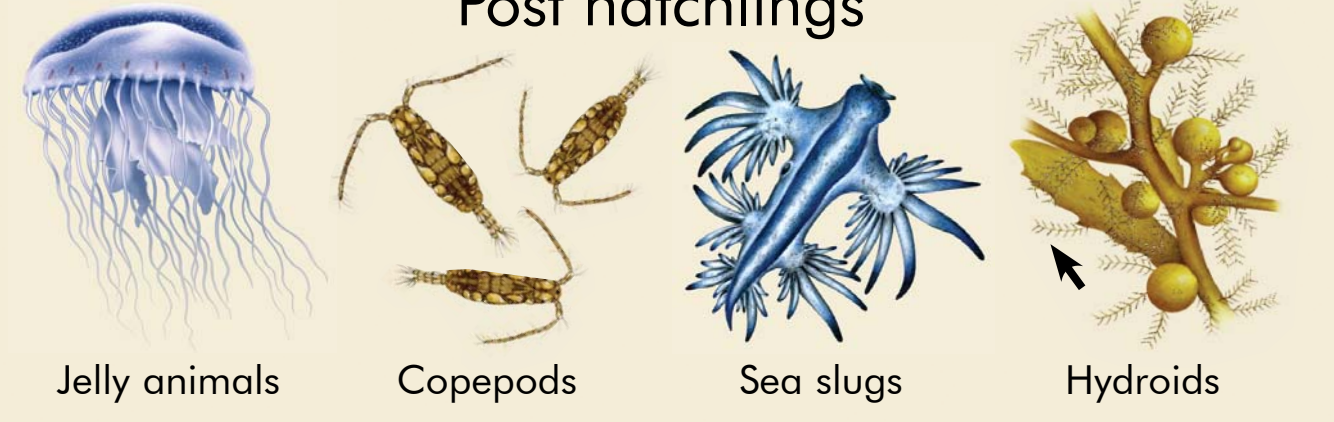
Hawksbills through different habitats as they mature, but apart from their breeding migrations, adults tend to remain within a familiar home range.

- 1 Nests average 140 eggs which incubate under sand for 55–75 days. Warmer sands produce mostly female turtles and cooler sands result in mostly males.
- 2 A few days after they hatch, the hatchlings emerge together from the nest at night, scramble quickly to the sea, and are dispersed by ocean currents.
- 3 The youngest juveniles live near the surface of deep ocean waters and are carried by ocean currents.
- 4 At about two years of age, juveniles swim into nearshore waters to inhabit reefs and other shallow habitats. Subadults may occupy deeper reefs.
- 5 Adults mate along migration routes between foraging and nesting areas and off the nesting beach.
- 6 Every 2–4 years, adult females migrate to the beach where they hatched and make about 3–6 nests at two-week intervals.

Diet

Hawksbills are unique for their specialization on eating sponges, many of which are toxic to most other animals.

Post hatchlings



Juveniles and Adults



Natural Predators

Although eggs and small hawksbills have many natural predators, large hawksbills have few.

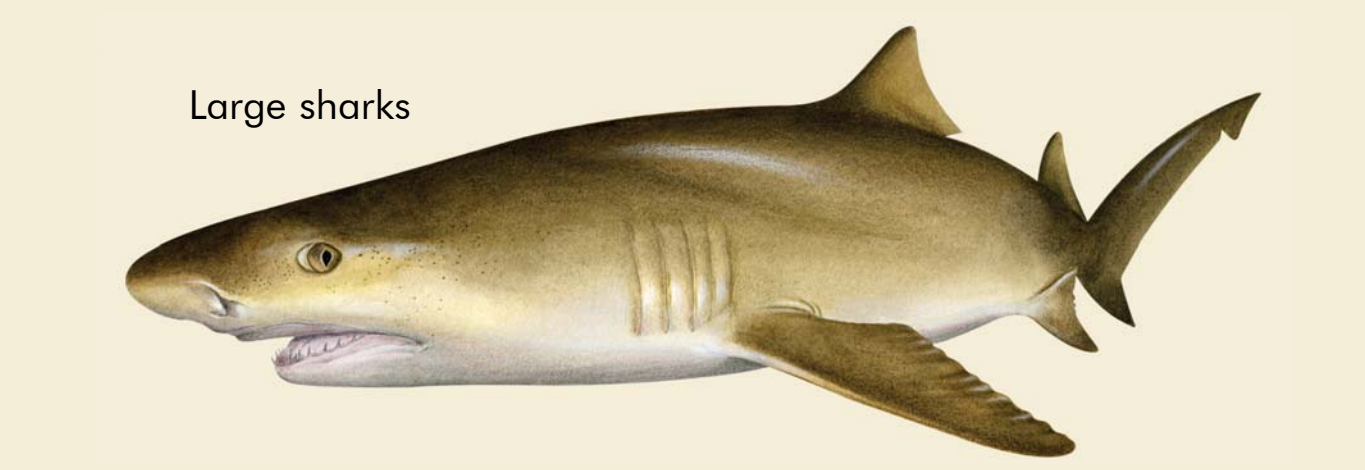
Eggs and Hatchlings



Post Hatchlings

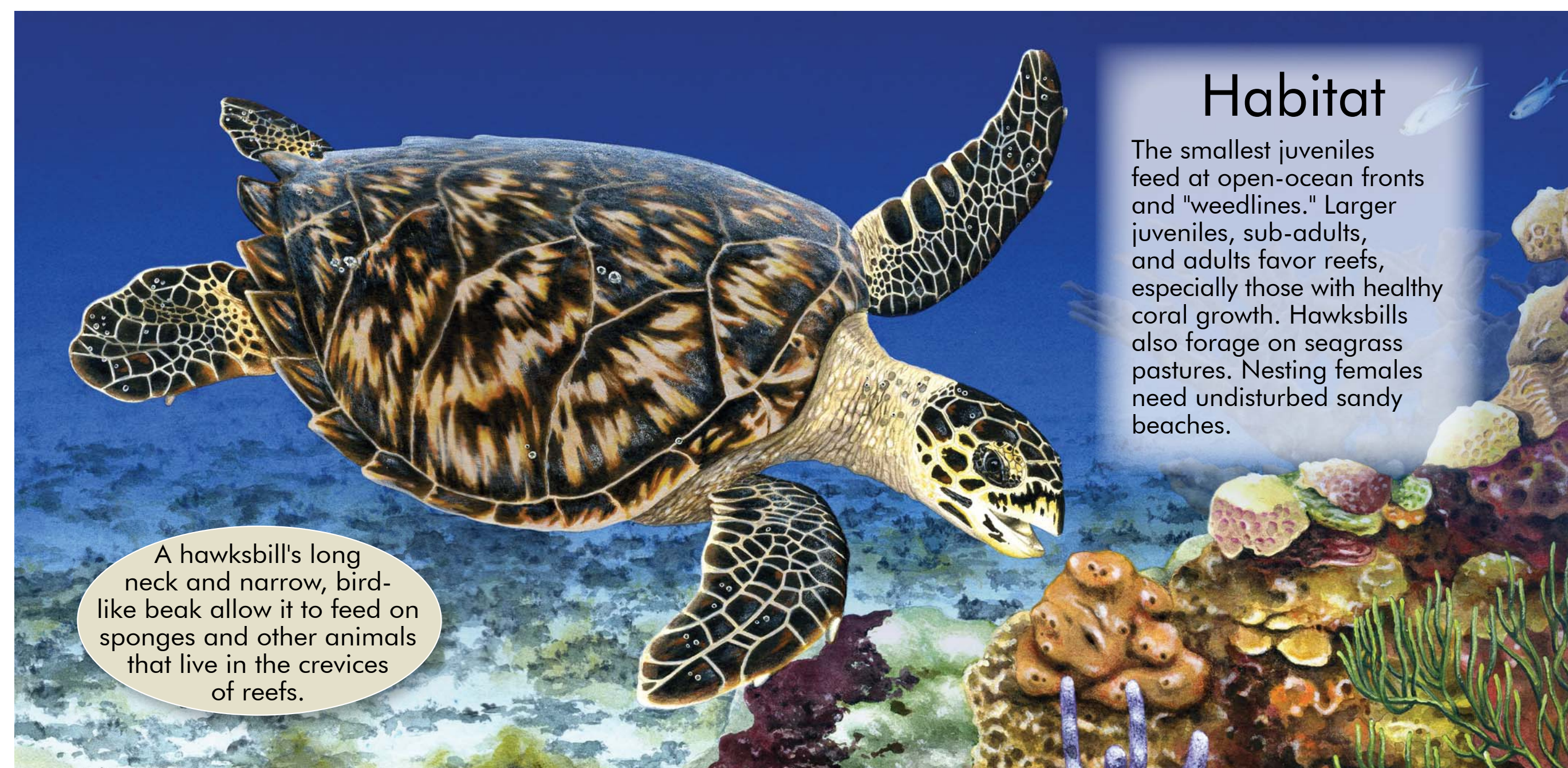


Juveniles and Adults



Habitat

The smallest juveniles feed at "weedlines." Larger juveniles, sub-adults, and adults favor reefs, especially those with healthy coral growth. Hawksbills also forage on seagrass pastures. Nesting females need undisturbed sandy beaches.



Nesting

Females take about an hour to dig a bay pit and egg chamber, lay their eggs, and scatter sand to camouflage their nest.



Tracks

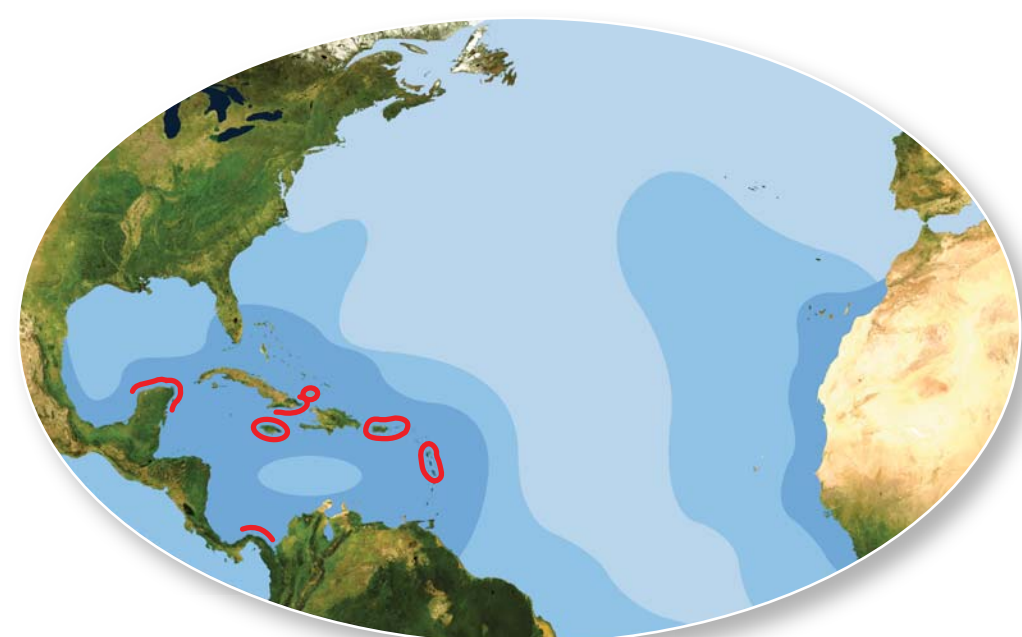
Alternating rear-flipper swirls are at the margin, and a wavy tail-drag line runs down the center.



↳ 24 in (60 cm) ↳

Regional Distribution

Hawksbill nesting is dispersed throughout the greater Caribbean. Florida receives only a few nests each year. The youngest juveniles live in open-sea surface waters. Larger juveniles, sub-adults, and adults are found in clear, shallow coastal waters.



- Oceanic juveniles
- Large juveniles and adults
- Major nesting beaches

Threats

Killing for tortoiseshell nearly drove the hawksbill to extinction. This raw material comes from the turtle's beautiful plastic-like shell scutes and is made into decorative items. A recent international ban on tortoiseshell trade is helping to reverse hawksbill declines.



Other important threats:

- **Marine Plastics** are an ingestion hazard
- **Light Pollution** misleads and kills hatchlings
- **Climate Change** destroys coral reef habitat
- **Fishing Debris** entangles and drowns turtles
- **Boat Strikes** kill and injure turtles

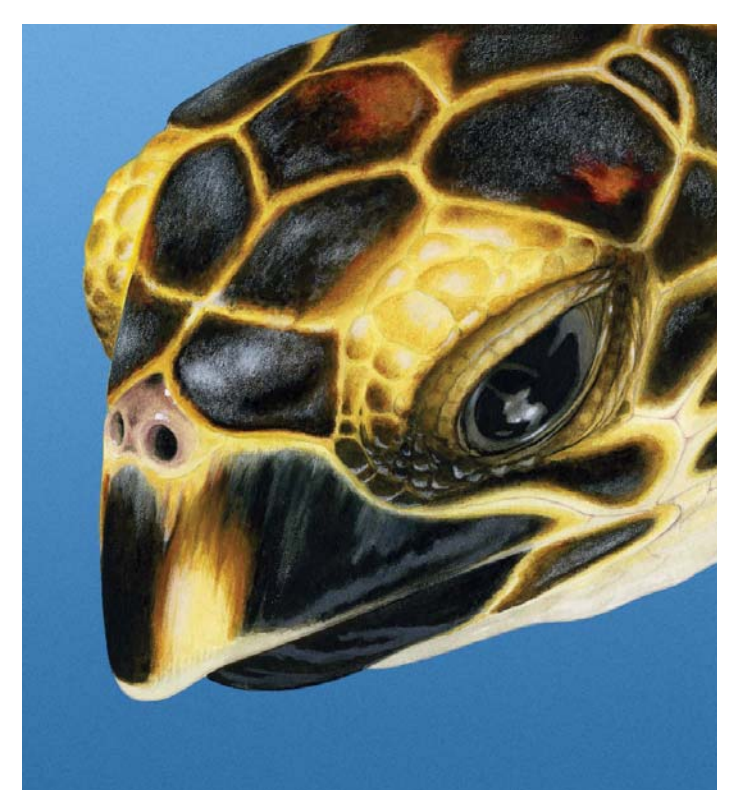
Conservation

Efforts to restore hawksbill populations rely on international cooperation. Conservation efforts include projects to monitor and safeguard nesting beaches, and international agreements to stop tortoiseshell trade and protect coral reef habitat.



How to Help

Although hawksbills are international marine animals that need help throughout their range to survive, there are many things we can do for them here at home. Make informed seafood choices, pick up marine litter, never purchase tortoiseshell products, consider beach conservation in tropical vacation decisions, contribute to marine conservation organizations, buy a sea turtle license plate, and share your interest in sea turtles with others.



SEA TURTLE CONSERVANCY Celebrating over 50 Years of Sea Turtle Conservation
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 4424 NW 13th St, Suite B-11, Gainesville, FL 32609
 Phone: 352-373-6441 • Fax: 352-375-2449
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