Sea turtles have lived in the world's oceans for over 150 million years. Sadly, these ancient reptiles are now globally threatened with extinction. Many populations are declining as a result of persistent hunting, increasing coastal development, incidental capture in fisheries, the degradation and destruction of nesting beaches, and marine pollution. You can help to protect them by following these simple guidelines.

TURTLE FACTS
- All species of sea turtle are endangered and need protection.
- Turtles can drown if they are prevented from reaching the surface of the sea to breathe.
- Litter is dangerous, especially plastic bags, which can be mistaken for jellyfish—a favorite turtle food.
- Turtles remain in the same region for years and, as adults, return to the same nesting area year after year. If a nesting colony is destroyed, the turtles may never return.

WHAT YOU CAN DO
- Support local sea turtle conservation initiatives—consider volunteering!
- Participate in local sighting networks and complete all sighting forms.
- Do not buy or sell turtle products—turtles are strictly protected under CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) and most national laws.

ON THE WATER
- Watch for turtles while boating—boat strikes can kill.
- When in the water, keep your distance and avoid startling turtles. Do not disturb resting, sleeping or feeding turtles.
- Approach turtles slowly and calmly and move away if they show signs of distress.
- Never try to spear, harass, catch, or ride turtles.
- Do not touch or feed turtles.
- Take all litter home with you; trash can kill, especially when it is mistaken for food.

Participating in turtle watching programs actually helps to protect turtles by raising awareness about them.

Be sure to find out about local laws and regulations, as they may differ from these general guidelines.

ON THE BEACH

During breeding seasons, some special considerations apply to turtle nesting beaches.

- Avoid damaging incubating nests—do not drive on a turtle nesting beach or use it for camp fires or barbecues.
- Do not leave large items (such as chairs, umbrellas or vehicles) on nesting beaches at night. These can obstruct a turtle's path and prevent egg-laying.
- Keep pets, especially dogs, away as they can endanger eggs and hatchlings.
- Minimize beach lighting; artificial lights disorient turtles.
- Shield or switch off lighting that is visible from the beach.

Watching Nesting Turtles

Turtles are very vulnerable on land and if startled, a turtle may return to the sea before her eggs can be successfully laid. Please follow these simple rules.

- Stay quiet and move slowly.
- Do not approach or photograph any turtles that have not yet laid their eggs.
- Make minimal use of flashlights and never shine lights directly into a turtle's face.
- Approach from behind and keep low to the ground.
- Move away if the turtle shows signs of distress.
- Never disturb turtle eggs or hatchlings.
- Limit viewing to 30 minutes at a time.

Photography

Flash photography of nesting turtles is illegal in some places. Use a camera flash very sparingly if at all and take photos only from behind to avoid blinding the turtle.

Hatchling Turtles

- Shield hatchlings from beachfront lighting. Ask that lights be turned off long enough for the hatchlings to reach the sea.
- Do not interfere with their crawl to the sea.
- Never photograph hatchlings—they are very sensitive to light.

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