

The 1966 U.S. Classification of *Chelonia mydas* as Rare and Endangered

From US Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, *Rare and Endangered Fish and Wildlife of the United States* (the "Red Book"), Resource Publication no. 34 (1966).

Peripheral*

GREEN TURTLE *Chelonia mydas mydas* Linnaeus

Order CHELONIA Family CHELONIDAE

Distinguishing characteristics: Abutting, non-overlapping shields on carapace; four pairs of lateral shields in shell; one pair of prefrontals on head; very large size; paddlelike feet.

Present distribution: Tropical oceans in shore waters. Wanders up United States coast during summer.

Former distribution: Same; but uses Florida beaches as a laying site.

Status: "Practically extirpated as a breeding entity in the fauna of the U.S." (Carr and Ingle). Still common as a breeding entity on Hawaiian Islands (RLW).

Estimated numbers: In U.S., probably very few, but world-wide, still fairly abundant.

Breeding rate in the wild: Probably once a year, although possibly once every two years, 125-200 eggs per female.

Reasons for decline: Widely used for food; young subject to very heavy predator and human pressure.

Protective measures already taken: Molestation of nesting sea turtles and their eggs is prohibited in South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Texas, Puerto Rico, and Hawaii. Hatchlings are flown from Caribbean beaches to Florida for release. Similar release techniques are employed in Buck Island Reef National Monument, Virgin Islands, and in Virgin Islands National Park. Results in the form of return of released hatchlings not verified as yet.

Measures proposed: Raising hatchlings in impoundments up to shell lengths of 6-8 inches, then releasing them (Carr and Ingle); establishment of protected breeding beaches.

Numbers in captivity: Very many, practically every saltwater aquarium and a few zoos have them often as many as 5-10.

Breeding potentiality in captivity: Practically nil; no opportunity to lay eggs.

References:

A. Carr and R. Ingle; *The Green Turtle in Florida*; Bull. Marine Sci. Gulf and Carib., 1959, pp. 315-20.

Ronald L. Walder (pers. comm.).

* The classification "peripheral" was defined as a species "whose occurrence in the United States is at the edge of its natural range and which is rare or endangered within the United States although not in its range as a whole."