



HAWAII INSTITUTE OF MARINE BIOLOGY PHOTO

By George H. Balazs

Common Name: Hawksbill Turtle

Scientific Name: Eretmochelys imbricata

Hawaiian Name: 'EA

Distribution: Native (indigenous) to the Hawaiian Islands and also found throughout other tropical and subtropical ocean areas. In Hawaii, usually found around the large, inhabited islands. The present population appears to be very small.

Description: This species grows to 30 inches or more in shell length. Adults weigh 100 pounds or more. Juveniles are colored various shades of brown, amber and gold. The body of the adult is dark brown or blackish above and is richly clouded with yellow. The scutes or "scales" of the head and flippers are brown or black and have a pale yellow border. The 13 large, brown, scutes of the carapace or dorsal "shell" are smooth and translucent; beautifully clouded with spots of black and yellow. The plastron or ventral "shell" is entirely yellow. This is the only sea turtle with overlapping scutes on the carapace. This is most noticeable in young turtles. As the turtles grow older, the scutes tend to assume an arrangement similar to the green sea turtle. Adult males have a longer, thicker tail than the females. The Hawksbill turtle was so named because its head is narrow and the upper jaw curves downward similar to the bill of a hawk.

Reproduction: Nests by burying eggs in sandy beaches above the high water mark. Single nestings have occurred in recent years on the islands of Molokai and Hawaii.

Remarks: Food consists of small crabs, molluscs and other invertebrate animals. In many areas of the world, this species continues to be exploited for the thick, translucent "tortoise shell" scutes. Scutes are commercially valuable, but of less importance than formerly due to the development of synthetic materials for ornamental use. The flesh of this species is not palatable, although the eggs are sought for food.

THE HAWKSBILL TURTLE IS OFFICIALLY CLASSED AS AN ENDANGERED SPECIES.