

Identification Notes for wildlife law enforcement

CATEGORY: _____

REPTILE

Scientific Name/s: _____

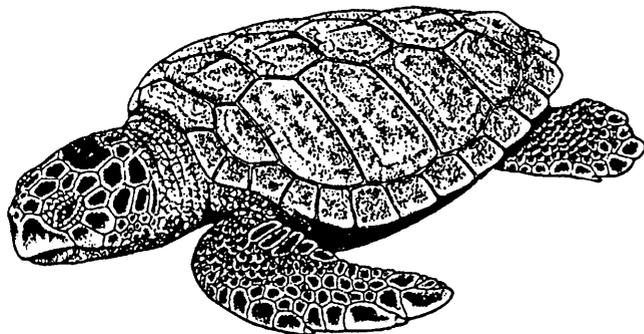
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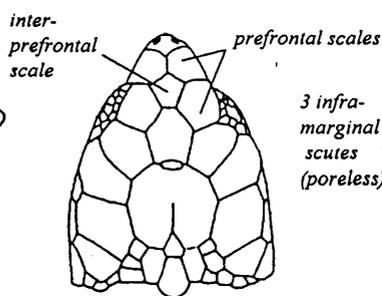
Common Name/s: Loggerhead (Sea) Turtle

PROBLEM: Verification of identification to species level of whole sea turtles is often required. This Quick Take, a supplement to Quick Take R-91-2, provides additional diagnostic information.

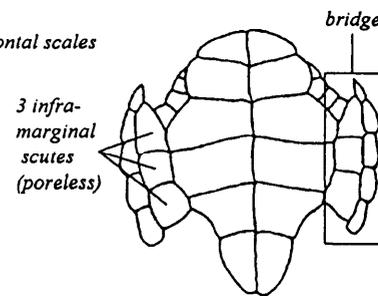
Caretta caretta (from CITES, 1984)



Dorsal View of Head



Plastron



DIAGNOSTIC FEATURES:

The carapace of the adult (viewed from above) is heart-shaped, its width 76- 86% of its length. Carapacial scutes are thin, hard, and very rough; often covered with barnacles. There are 5 pairs of pleurals, the anterior touching the cervical scute, 5 vertebral and commonly 12 or 13 pairs of marginals.

The plastron bridge has 3 pairs of inframarginal scutes which rarely have pores.

Head large, broad and **subtriangular**, 23- 28% of carapace length, with 2 pairs of prefrontal scales, and commonly one interprefrontal; horny beak very strong, comparatively thicker than in other sea turtles.

Front flippers are relatively short and thick, each with 2 visible claws on the anterior margin; rear flippers have 2 or 3 claws.

Hatchlings and juveniles have blunt spines forming 3 longitudinal keels on the carapace.

Color: Adults display a reddish-brown dorsal pattern, sometimes with dark streaks (South African turtles), that becomes creamy orange on the flanks and creamy yellow underneath. The **plastron** is usually pale. **Hatchlings** are dark brown dorsally, with flippers pale brown on the sides and bottoms.

Subspecies: The subspecies, *Caretta caretta gigas* in the Pacific and *Caretta caretta caretta* in the Atlantic, are no longer considered valid. Most authorities recognize *Caretta caretta* as a polymorphic species.

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