

Identification Notes for wildlife law enforcement

CATEGORY: _____

REPTILE

Scientific Name/s: *Chelonia mydas*

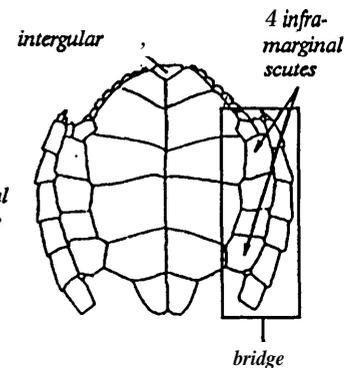
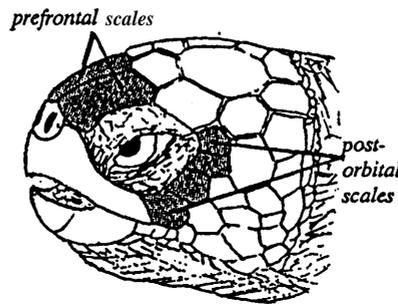
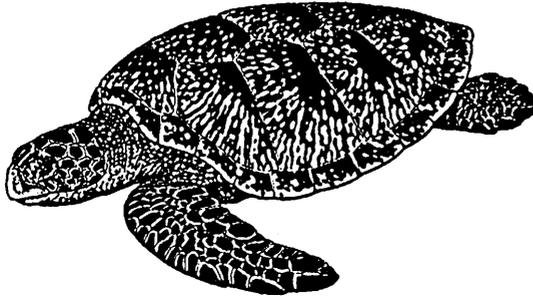
Common Name/s: Green (sea) Turtle

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.

Chelonia mydas (from CITES, 1984)

Side View of Head

Plastron



DIAGNOSTIC FEATURES:

Carapace (viewed from above) oval, its width about **88%** of its length. **Carapacial scutes** are thin, smooth and flexible when removed. There are 4 pairs of **pleurals** (the most anterior one does not touch the **cervical scute**), 5 vertebral, and usually 12 pairs of **marginals**. Body depressed.

Plastron smooth and **scutes** rather thin, bridge with 4 **inframarginal scutes**. An **intergular** is present.

Head relatively small and blunt, about **20%** of carapace length. One pair elongated prefrontal scales, four postorbital scales; lower jaw with a sharply serrated, **cutting** rim, upper jaw with strong ridges on inner surface.

Flippers with one anterior claw on the anterior margin.

Hatchlings and juveniles with low-keeled vertebral. Newly hatched individuals dark brown or nearly black above, white below. Head, carapace, and rear edge of flippers with white or yellowish margin.

Color: General appearance of carapace varies from pale to very dark, and from plain to having radiated stripes of yellow, brown, and/or greenish tones.

Variation: Dorsal aspect of Pacific populations tends to be darker than that of Atlantic populations. Ventral aspect of Atlantic population plain, dirty, or yellowish **white**; ventral aspect of Pacific specimens tends to dark grey or bluish green.

REFERENCES:

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Ernst, C. H. & R. W. Barbour. 1989. Turtles of the World. Smithsonian Inst. Press. 313 pp.

Hirth, H. F. 1971. Synopsis of biological data on the green turtle *Chelonia mydas* (Linnaeus) 1758. FAO Fisheries Synopsis 85: pag.var.

Marquez, M.R. 1990. FAO species catalogue. Vol. 11: Sea Turtles of the World. An annotated and illustrated catalogue of sea turtle species known to date. FAO Fisheries Synopsis 11(125):81 pp.