

## BOOK REVIEW

# Sea Turtles: A Guide for the General Public

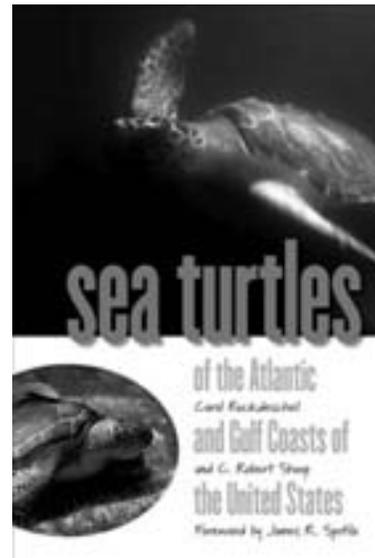
*Sea Turtles of the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts of the United States.* 2006. By Carol Ruckdeschel and C. Robert Shoop; foreword by James R. Spotila. The University of Georgia Press, Athens, Georgia, USA. vii + 136 pp. Paperback – ISBN: 0-8203-2614-3 – \$19.95.

Anyone who has ever walked along a beach and seen a sea turtle emerge from the ocean will never forget the experience. Although these marine reptiles have roamed the oceans for over a hundred million years, in the past few centuries their populations have declined toward extinction at the hands of humans. Today, all sea turtles are listed as endangered or critically endangered by the IUCN Redlist (2006) and are protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. Whether the conservation efforts of governments or NGOs around the world are able to repair the damage remains to be seen, but the galvanization of public support through education is a necessary part of conservation work if we are to have any hope of success. This book is an excellent introduction for the general public to some of the seas' most beautiful animals.

The first chapter gives a broad introduction to sea turtle biology and includes general life history stages, diets, diseases, and predators. A brief section on conservation talks about some of the threats facing sea turtles living in the coastal waters of the eastern U.S. and some of the efforts being used to address them, such as turtle excluder devices (TEDs) installed on fishing nets. No mention was made of head-starting programs, such as that on Padre Island. These have had mixed results and have become quite controversial in recent years (see references). A set of brief guidelines for people who wish to observe nesting turtles concludes the introduction.

The bulk of the book (pp. 35–106) is devoted to accounts of each of the six species found along the eastern coast of the United States: Leatherbacks (*Dermochelys coriacea*), Loggerheads (*Caretta caretta*), Kemp's Ridleys (*Lepidochelys kempii*), Olive Ridleys (*L. olivacea*), Greens (*Chelonia mydas*), and Hawksbills (*Eretmochelys imbricata*). Each account follows the same format, starting with the species' status and its distribution, which is illustrated with color maps, followed by extensive descriptions that include photographs, sections on life history and behavior, and ending with summaries of conservation threats and work specific to that species.

A one-page epilogue emphasizes the importance of further conservation work, and gives a list of ways for the public to help. Concluding the book is an appendix, which contains useful and easy-to-follow keys and a glossary. The key uses numerous illustrations to clarify the written descriptions. In addition to a key for identifying living turtles, another helps identify carcasses that may have washed ashore. The latter is based on different body parts, in case the turtle has begun to decompose. The glossary



provides clear and simple definitions for all technical and turtle-specific terms and a short list of books and websites that provide further information on sea turtles.

Taken as a whole, this book summarizes a great deal of information, although it is a bit dry and tedious at times. Each account differs in only a few species-specific details, which becomes repetitive. The authors have amassed a large collection of photographs, which add immensely to the appearance and utility of the book. The photographs and the keys are this book's strongest points. Diagrams and illustrations generally were quite good, although some (e.g., Fig. 1, p. 14, which shows the relative sizes of eggs produced by different species) seemed less than professional in quality. Overall, however, Ruckdeschel and Shoop did an excellent job of compiling an easy-to-understand guide to sea turtles for the general public.

## References

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