Sea Turtle Identification Key

Leathery, no scutes; 5 long ridges

Hard carapace (shell) with large scutes (shell plates)

One pair prefrontal scales

First costal scute does not touch nuchal

4 costal (lateral) scutes; Carapace not circular

Two pairs prefrontal scales; overlapping scutes

First costal scute; does not touch nuchal

5 or more costal scutes; Carapace not circular

Carapace wide and almost circular

Leatherback  
Dermochelys coriacea

Green  
Chelonia mydas

Black*  

Flatback  
Natator depressus

Hawksbill  
Eretmochelys imbricata

Loggerhead  
Caretta caretta

Kemp’s Ridley  
Lepidochelys kempii

Olive Ridley  
Lepidochelys olivacea

Sea turtle figures used by permission of the Marine Turtle Specialist Group (iucn-mtsg.org)

### Species Descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Name</th>
<th>Spanish Name</th>
<th>Scientific Name</th>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Carapace</th>
<th>Plastron</th>
<th>Head</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leatherback</td>
<td>Baula, Tortuga Laúd, Tora</td>
<td><em>Dermochelys coriacea</em></td>
<td>dark gray/black with white spots</td>
<td>tapered; leathery with 5 ridges</td>
<td>relatively small</td>
<td>tooth-like notch on either side of upper jaw; no scales</td>
<td>all oceans, subarctic to tropical; pelagic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Turtle</td>
<td>Tortuga Verde, Tortuga Blanca</td>
<td><em>Chelonia mydas</em></td>
<td>J: radiating streaks; A: brown, buff</td>
<td>4 costal scutes</td>
<td>yellowish; 4 inframarginal scutes</td>
<td>round face; serrated jaw; 1 pair elongate prefrontal scales</td>
<td>all oceans, subarctic to tropical; pelagic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Turtle*</td>
<td>Tortuga Negra, Prieta</td>
<td><em>Chelonia mydas</em></td>
<td>black or grayish with black markings</td>
<td>4 costal scutes</td>
<td>cream to gray; 4 inframarginal scutes</td>
<td>round face; serrated jaw; 1 pair elongate prefrontal scales</td>
<td>East Pacific Ocean; bays and coastal waters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flatback Turtle</td>
<td>Kikila, Tortuga Franca Oriental</td>
<td><em>Natator depressus</em></td>
<td>olive grey</td>
<td>4 costal scutes; broad and round; upturned margins</td>
<td>yellowish; 4 inframarginal scutes</td>
<td>preocular scale; wide; flat; triangular</td>
<td>tropical coastal Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawksbill Turtle</td>
<td>Tortuga Carey</td>
<td><em>Eretmochelys imbricata</em></td>
<td>amber and brown streaks</td>
<td>4 costal scutes; (usually) overlapping scutes; oval</td>
<td>cream with dark blotches front and rear; 4 inframarginal scutes</td>
<td>curved beak; distinct overbite; 2 pair prefrontal scales</td>
<td>all oceans; tropical waters; reef areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loggerhead</td>
<td>Caguama, Amarilla, Cabezona, Tortuga Boba</td>
<td><em>Caretta caretta</em></td>
<td>red brown to brown</td>
<td>longer than wide; 5 or more costal scutes, first very small</td>
<td>yellow to orange, 3 inframarginal scutes</td>
<td>large head; 4 or more prefrontal scales</td>
<td>all oceans; primarily temperate waters; near shore, often associate with structures (i.e., wrecks, platforms)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kemp’s Ridley</td>
<td>Tortuga Lora, Cotorra</td>
<td><em>Lepidochelys kempii</em></td>
<td>gray to light olive green</td>
<td>round; 5 (sometimes 6) costal scutes</td>
<td>white to yellow; 4 inframarginal scutes with pores</td>
<td>triangular; relatively large; 2 pair prefrontal scales</td>
<td>Gulf of Mexico, eastern USA; coastal; &lt; 16° N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olive Ridley</td>
<td>Tortuga Golfin, Tortuga Olivacea, Parlama</td>
<td><em>Lepidochelys olivacea</em></td>
<td>gray to olive green</td>
<td>nearly round; 6 - 9 costal scutes, number may be asymmetrical</td>
<td>cream/white; 4 inframarginal scutes with pores</td>
<td>triangular; relatively large; 2 pair prefrontal scales</td>
<td>tropical waters of Pacific, Indian and South Atlantic Oceans; pelagic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The status of the Black turtle or east Pacific green turtle, sometime referred to as *Chelonia agassizii* or *C. mydas agassizii*, remains uncertain. Recent genetic evidence supports an Atlantic-Mediterranean vs. Indian-Pacific grouping, while morphological and behavioral data suggest an east Pacific species or subspecies.

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**SUGGESTED REFERENCES**

