

Leatherback

SEA TURTLE

Dermochelys coriacea



- The leatherback sea turtle is the largest species of sea turtle and the only soft-shelled sea turtle
 - The largest recorded leatherback weighed over 2,000 pounds and was nearly 10 feet long
- They get their name from their leathery shell, made up of thousands of bony plates that aid in diving to extreme depths
 - Can dive to depths around 4,000 feet
- Leatherbacks are open-ocean animals and feed exclusively on jellyfish



- Leatherbacks are commonly known as “trunk turtles” and is the namesake of St. John’s famous Trunk Bay
 - Historically, leatherback nesting was common on St. John, but is now rare
- Leatherbacks commonly nest in St. Croix and Puerto Rico, although their numbers are decreasing
- Leatherbacks migrate greater distances than any sea turtle, with recorded migrations of up to 3,700 miles between foraging and breeding areas
- Although they nest in the tropics, they can tolerate temperatures lower than 40° F and unlike most reptiles have the ability to regulate their body temperature



- Global populations of leatherbacks are declining at a considerable rate and are in need of re-classification of endangerment status (IUCN ‘Vulnerable’ classification in 2013)
- Regional declines of nesting females and nests have been documented and it is estimated that the population has decreased by about 67%
- Threats: fisheries bycatch, plastic pollution, poaching, habitat loss, climate change, coastal development

