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VANUATU ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE SOCIETY

Threatened Species Factsheet No. 20

LOGGERHEAD TURTLE

What are they called?

Scientific:
Caretta caretta
Common English:
Loggerhead Turtle
French: Tortue caouanne
Bislama: Totel
Vernacular:

A little about them:

These large seaturtles are marine reptiles. Loggerheads can reach lengths over 1m and weigh up to 180kg. They use their large powerful jaws to eat hard-shelled invertebrates in coral reefs including crabs, snails, clams, sea urchins and jellyfish.

The shell of seaturtles, especially Loggerheads, are a home for many small marine species that eat algae such as barnacles and crabs.

Loggerhead Turtles grow slowly and are about 35 years old before they can lay eggs. Females travel lay every 2-3 years.

What do they look like?

Loggerhead seaturtles have very big heads supported by a thick neck. The shell is reddish-brown to brown and light yellow underneath. They have 4 small scales between their eyes which is useful to tell them apart from Green Turtles. Hatchlings (baby turtles) are dark all over and have 3 ridges running down their backs.

Did you know?

- Loggerhead Turtles lay 80-190 eggs in each nest.
- Only 1 out of 1000 hatchlings will survive to breeding age.
- Some people have said they've seen Loggerheads in Vanuatu but scientists haven't confirmed this.

Loggerhead Turtles are classified as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.

Why are they threatened?

- They are accidently caught in fishing nets as bycatch.
- Adults and eggs are illegally eaten.
- Their habitat is threatened by coastal developments and pollution increasing sediment on the reef and destroying nesting beaches.
- Seaturtle hatchlings are confused by artificial lights and cannot find their way to the ocean.

What do they do for us?

- As Loggerhead turtles crunch up hard-shelled prey, they recycle nutrients on the ocean floor.
- Seaturtles lay eggs on sandy beaches. These beach environments benefit from left over eggshells and unhatched eggs nourishing native plants and animals.
- Help increase range of small marine species such as barnacles which live on their backs.
- Create tourism opportunities as people like to see turtles in their natural environment.

What can we do for them?

- ✓ Leave nesting turtles alone and do not remove their eggs.
- ✓ Use fishing gear that does not catch seaturtles by accident.
- ✓ Keep bright lights away from nesting sites of all seaturtles.
- ✓ Avoid using plastic wherever possible and put all rubbish in the bin so it doesn't end up in the ocean.

Want to know more?

- Read **the *Pacific Sea Turtle Education kit*** by SPREP
- Visit: www.iucnredlist.org

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