

Threats

The loggerhead sea turtle is currently in danger of extinction on our coasts. Whereas these are especially vulnerable species in the first stages of life, several threats endanger these animals:

- **Pollution and plastics adrift.** Bags and plastics at the sea are mistaken for jellyfish and ingested by turtles, blocking their digestive system and even causing death.
- **Fishing nets.** One of the major threats to these animals is the catch in trawl nets, hooks which cause injuries and nets adrift where turtles tangle up, resulting in cuts in flippers, strangulation and other injuries which make them lose limbs and suffer from infections or gangrene.
- **Trade.** Some countries sell many ornamental products made of turtle shells. Also, turtles' eggs and meat have been highly sought for human consumption. The international trade of turtle products is forbidden and governed by the Washington Convention or CITES.
- **Collisions.** Marine traffic has increased and, therefore, it is frequent to see animals injured by the propellers of vessels or by collisions against the hull. These injuries can even cause death to turtles.
- **Destruction of egg layings.** Unfortunately, the destruction of nesting areas is the main threat to all sea turtle species. The demographic growth, as well as the necessities of the tourist industry, have had negative effects on the nesting beaches. Thus, the areas where turtles lay eggs have been reduced.



Photo: T. Lucas



Photo: P. Calabuig



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Environmental Voluntary Service

The conservation of sea turtles is a difficult task which is not only the responsibility of international, national and local institutions, but it is also the responsibility of all the citizens in the planet.

Some conservationist associations have established over the last years in order to draw attention on the risks of extinction of these beautiful sea animals. Some environmental voluntary groups have emerged willing to generously devote their time and efforts to protect the turtles' habitats, to recover and heal injured turtles and to collaborate in reintroduction projects.

Young people from the Canary Islands have been carrying out a programme for the conservation and the study of sea turtles in Cape Verde, where Professor Luis Felipe López Jurado discovered, in 1997, the third biggest nesting colony in the world. Directed by the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and supported by the Government of the Canary Islands, the Island Council [Cabildo] of Fuerteventura and the Government of Cape Verde, they dedicate 3 weeks of their holidays, during the months of June, July, August and September, to take part in the camp site of the beach of Ervatao, in the island of Boa Vista. During this period, they supervise trails, mark turtles, take samples, measure adult turtles, count eggs, control the births and create turtle nurseries. Furthermore, Environmental Voluntary Associations have been established, collaborating in the conservation of marine species in Fuerteventura and taking part in the care of the turtle nests located in the beach of Cofete.

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Marine turtles in Fuerteventura

Project for the reintroduction of the loggerhead sea turtle



Colaboradores:



Graphic design: Bruno Lanza - EliaBla Comunicación



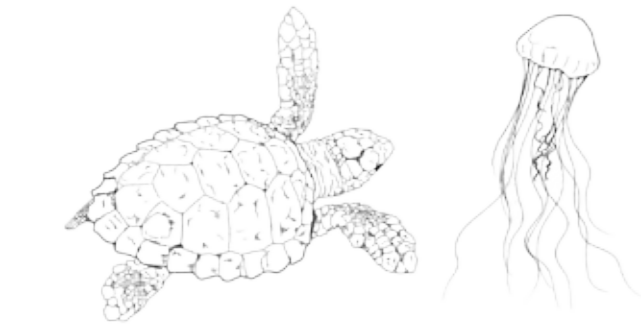
Marine turtles

In the Canaries, four specimens are present: The Leatherback Turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*), that lives in the Atlantic Ocean's deepest waters; the Boba Turtle (*Caretta caretta*), the most common in the Canaries, and the Green Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) and Hawksbill Turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), who are occasionally found in our islands.

Loggerhead sea turtle

The loggerhead sea turtle has included the Canary Islands in its migratory route around the Atlantic. Mainly juveniles and some adults of this species can be found in our waters all year round, with greatest abundance in summer.

The quiet waters of the SCI of the Playas de Sotavento de Jandía are chosen by these turtles because of the calm and quiet atmosphere. It is not unusual to find them sunbathing, floating on the surface of the sea, as they thermo-regulate, much the same as other reptiles do.



Throughout their lives, mainly spent in ocean waters, the loggerhead turtles feed on crustaceans, molluscs, fish, jellyfish, and other marine creatures. From the age of 15 onwards, they begin to reproduce, visiting the beaches where they were born for this purpose.

Although there are records of nesting of loggerhead sea turtles on Fuerteventura's beaches, probably extreme human pressure along the coastline has caused them to desist from using these beaches to lay their eggs.

Life cycle

Marine turtles are born on sandy beaches in tropical and warm areas. As soon as they hatch, normally at night, they engage in a frantic race to the sea in order to avoid natural predators such as seagulls and crabs.



Once they have reached the water, they swim and swim for a race until the deep sea where they will live the first phases of their life (juvenile phase). A few years later, depending on the species, the young adult turtles come back to the coastal waters and settle in their own feeding areas.

Once they reach sexual maturity (between 7 and 25 years depending on the species), they migrate periodically (every 2 to 3 years) to mating areas and females then make their way to nesting beaches in the areas where they were born, following a very special pattern and completing this way the life cycle of the species.

They spend most of their life in the opens seas and cover long distances which makes them very vulnerable during each of their life phases; but it is especially true when they are born and during their first months.

From Cape Verde to Canary Islands

Several historic quotations confirm the presence of nesting turtles in the Canary Islands. Turtles were a significant source of food for the ancient islanders, who used to eat both the adult animals and the eggs laid under the sand of the beaches.

Due to the human pressure on the turtle populations, the Canary Islands were no more the place for the nesting of these animals.

The project for the reintroduction of loggerhead sea turtles (*Caretta caretta*) aims to establish again a turtle population laying eggs on the beaches of the Canaries. By using the population from the Cape Verde Islands as the donor population, diverse factors were considered and the beach of Cofete, in the island of Fuerteventura, was chosen as the ideal site to develop this ambitious plan.

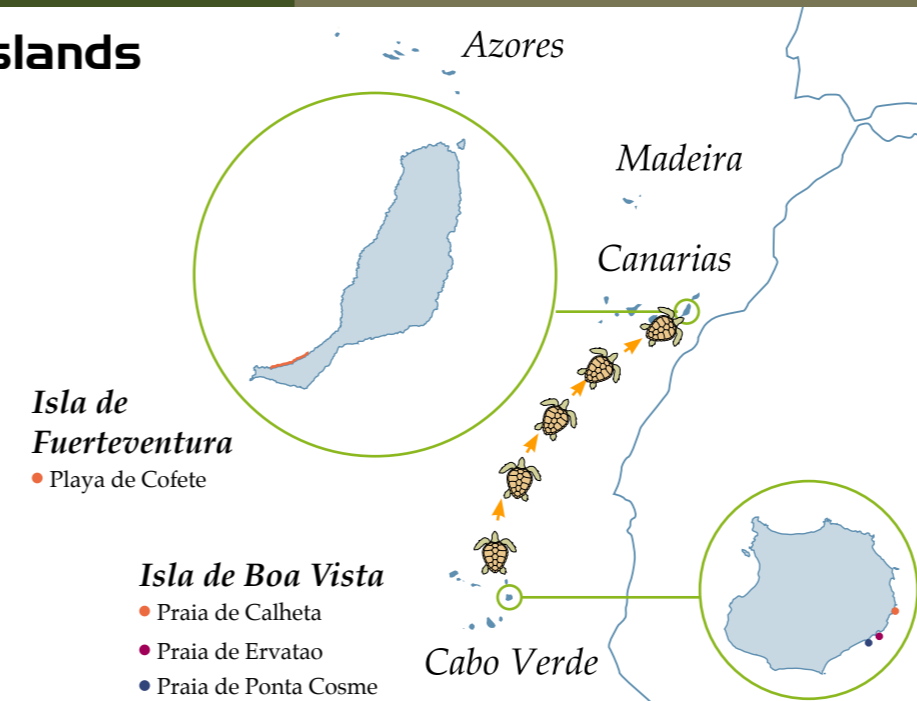
Transfer and incubation in the Canary Islands

The third loggerhead sea turtle population in the world nests on the isles of Cape Verde. Researches and studies on nesting populations have been carried out for over ten years in the turtle camp on Ervatao, on the island of Boa Vista. These studies have proven that turtles do not always choose the most suitable place to nest and, as a result of which, up to the 80% of the eggs laid fail to hatch in some sites.

These eggs are used to perform our experience of reintroducing turtles into the Canary Islands, so it does not affect the original population and these eggs have a second opportunity to live.



Eggs taken from Cape Verde to Fuerteventura.



Placing nests on the beach of Cofete.



Egg incubation in the facilities of the Institute of Marine Sciences of the Canary Islands.

Hatching and release

Once the eggs hatch, the newborn turtles are taken to sea water tanks, within "Sodade" turtle nursery, located in Morro Jable, where these are fed until they reach the adequate size to be released. By doing this, turtles' chances of surviving increase, since they avoid the hazards which await baby turtles during their first life stages, when they are more vulnerable.

About one year after hatching, the turtles are released on the beaches chosen and they are expected to come back within about 15 years to nest, once they reach adulthood, completing their life cycle and repopulating the waters of the Canary Islands.



Egg hatching and Sodade turtle nursery, in Morro Jable.

Turtle release.

