

Turtle Threats: Predatory Animals

Turtles are vulnerable to a range of threats because:

- When baby turtles are born they are on their own; their mothers aren't around to care for them or teach them how to avoid threats.
- They don't begin breeding until they are about 30 to 40 years old (depending on the species).
- Development and lighting along the coast disturb turtles that need to nest on or close to the same beach that they originally hatched on, and stop the hatchlings from being able to find the ocean.
- Their gender is dependent on the temperature of the sand in which the eggs are hatched: the warmer the sand, the more females will be born. This means that climate change, which will raise temperatures around the globe, could result in too many female turtles and not enough males.
- They make long migrations. Spending so much time travelling in the water means that they are exposed to more impacts, as turtles may travel from safe waters to waters that are full of dangers such as fishing nets, boats or marine debris. They have poor hearing and sight when above the surface of the water. This means boats often hit them.
- There are a range of threats to nesting beaches and nests, including predators, people, vehicles, varying temperatures, and flooding or natural erosion (washing nests away).



How do predatory animals threaten turtles?

- Turtles are food for a range of animals. Some of these predators hunt turtles in the water, while others live on land and hunt the turtles as eggs or newly born hatchlings.
- On some beaches in northern Australia, feral pigs, foxes, dogs and native goannas like to eat turtle eggs. Sharks, crabs, crocodiles and birds all eat hatchlings once they have reached the ocean, while sharks and crocodiles will also hunt adult turtles.
- Predatory animals are the main threat on a number of nesting beaches in northern Australia.

- Feral animals also cause problems for turtles. Feral animals are introduced species that aren't naturally found in a particular place or country. They can cause a lot of damage to native plants and animals because the native plants and animals have not developed ways to defend themselves against them.
- Some people also hunt turtles for their meat, eggs or shell to eat, for cultural reasons or to sell. They are also considered totems in some communities. The loss of turtles may mean loss of these practices.



Once you have read through this information, you will need to work in your groups to create a poster or presentation to share with the other people in your class. You will need to undertake the research necessary to find out the answers to the following points and then include this information in your poster or presentation:

- A description of the threat
- How this threat affects turtles
- Where this threat occurs
- The particular species of turtle that is/are affected

In addition, pick one of the following questions to answer:

- What sorts of things are being done to stop predatory animals from eating turtle eggs?
- What is one thing that you found interesting or important about predatory animals and/or turtles that you want to share with the class?

Work in your groups to create a poster or presentation to share the information you have found.

Some places to get information about marine turtles:

- WWF - Green Turtle and Hawksbill Turtle
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority - Marine Turtles
- Australian Government Department of Environment and Energy - Marine Turtles in Australia
- Sea Turtle Foundation
- Western Cape Turtle Threat Abatement Alliance
- Department of Environment and Heritage Protection - Marine Turtles
- Reef Guardian Schools - Marine Turtles.

Some places to get information about predatory animals:

- ABC News - Feral Pig-Proof Fence Could Save 40,000 Endangered Turtle Eggs On Remote Queensland Beach
- Australian Government Department of Environment and Energy - Feral animals in Australia.

