



HAGGAN (green sea turtle) *Chelonia mydas*

Endangered Species

Native Resident

The haggan, as the green sea turtle is known in Chamorro, is the most commonly sighted turtle in Guam's waters. They frequent the shallow reef areas while foraging for marine algae and seagrass. Fully grown adults can have a shell length of four feet (1.2 m) and can weigh more than 300 pounds (136 kg). Sea turtles are long-lived animals and grow reasonably slow, averaging about 0.4 inches (1 cm) a year until mature and then 0.2 inches (0.5 cm). Using these growth rates, larger adults are well over 50 years of age. The haggan is characterized by a shell colored with mottled shades of brown and a white to yellow underside. The shell plates are fused with no overlap, points or protrusions. The head has two plates between the eyes and each flipper has only one claw.

These turtles spend most of their lives in the ocean but adults return every few years to the beach where they were born. Mating takes place a month or two prior to egg laying near the nest site and mating continues through the egg laying cycle. Females must, on the average, be 23 years old to reach 32 inches (81 cm), the average size at first maturity. Once fertile, the female will crawl onto a sandy shoreline and use her flippers to dig a large pit above the high-water line near some vegetation. She lays 40-140 eggs, depending on her size, and covers them with sand. A female can lay as many as six clutches of eggs in one nesting season, which runs from April through July on Guam. The eggs take 50 to 90 days to hatch, depending on conditions. The eggs hatch near sunrise when two-inch (5 cm) long hatchlings emerge from their eggs, dig up through the sand, and start their journey to sea. Haggan still nest on some of the remote beaches throughout Guam.

Turtle meat and turtle eggs were once prized food sources on Guam. The shells were used for decorative purposes. World-wide concern for overharvesting however, has resulted in protection of the haggan under the federal and local Endangered Species Acts. It is illegal to capture, harass, possess, buy, sell, or transport the haggan or any part thereof, including, but not limited to, eggs, shells, shell jewelry, and meat.