**The United Kingdom Turtle Code**

Advice for sea users on how to deal with marine turtle encounters

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### PLEASE REPORT ALL TURTLE ENCOUNTERS

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<td><strong>ALL RECORDS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rod Penrose, Marine Environmental Monitoring</td>
<td>Laura Clark, Marine Monitoring Officer</td>
<td>The Coastal Zone Centre at Portrush (DOENI)</td>
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<tr>
<td>01239 683033 (24hrs)</td>
<td>01463 725237</td>
<td>028 7082 3600</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.strandings.com">www.strandings.com</a></td>
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<td><strong>LIVE STRANDINGS/ENTANGLEMENTS</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>RSPCA 0300 1234999 BDMLR 01825 765546</td>
<td>Nick Davison, Scottish Agricultural College</td>
<td>Dr Thomas Doyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marine Operations Centre 01624 686623 (24hrs)</td>
<td>01463 243030</td>
<td>Coastal &amp; Marine Research Centre, University College Cork</td>
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<td></td>
<td>07979 245893 <a href="mailto:strandings@sruc.ac.uk">strandings@sruc.ac.uk</a></td>
<td>00353 (0) 21 4703119 (Direct)</td>
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**REPORT ONLINE AT:** www.euroturtle.org/turtlecode & www.mcsuk.org

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### WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND A SICK OR ENTANGLED TURTLE

Immediately report the turtle to the relevant contact. Marine turtles will drown if trapped underwater, but prompt action can save them. A turtle that is entangled or trapped is likely to be stressed. Large turtles deliver a serious bite and a blow from a flipper can be painful, so be careful. Due to possible health risks involved in handling turtles, always wear rubber gloves.

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**TURTLES ENTANGLED AT SEA**

Approach calmly and cautiously and ensure first of all that the turtle's head is above water so that it can breathe if it is alive.

**ALIVE:** AVOID TOWING TURTLES TO SHORE. They should be disentangled and released at sea whenever possible.

**If alert & active:**
- Do not use a gaff to pull the turtle alongside and do not haul leatherbacks aboard.
- Avoid pulling hard on the turtle’s flippers as they may dislocate or break.
- Carefully disentangle the turtle, making sure that as much net and line as possible has been removed before the animal is released.
- Make sure that the vessel is stopped and out of gear before carefully sliding the turtle back into the water.
- Ensure that the turtle is clear of the vessel before moving away.

ONLY if disentanglement at sea is impossible should the turtle be brought ashore.

**DEAD:** There may be serious health risks involved in handling dead turtles. Inexperienced individuals are advised not to touch them. Where possible, record the details listed above and, only if the specimen is fresh, bring it back to shore and place in cold storage. Always wear rubber gloves when handling turtles.

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**TURTLES STRANDED ON LAND**

**Leatherback turtles**

Leatherbacks found stranded on beaches are usually very weak, dead or dying, but might still be saved.

- Carefully drag the turtle back to the sea and release it (enlist the help of several people and pull the shell rather than the flippers).
- Do not drag the animal over rocks, as this will cause severe damage.
- If stranded on rocks, it may be better to wait for the incoming tide to provide some buoyancy before dragging the turtle back to sea.

**Other species (hard-shelled)**

Loggerhead, Kemp's ridley, green and hawksbill turtles encountered on UK shores are usually cold stunned juveniles and should not be placed back in the sea.

- Wrap the turtle in a towel soaked in seawater.
- Do not cover the nostrils.
- Place the animal in a sheltered and secure place on its belly. To drain the lungs, raise the back end of the shell so the turtle is resting at approximately 30°. Keep it in this position until you return to shore.
- Leatherbackers should not be hauled aboard. If inactive, they can be towed to shore very slowly, ensuring they are able to breathe at all times.

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For copies of this code and information about turtles in UK waters, contact MCS on 01989 566017 or info@mcsuk.org
Of the world's seven marine turtle species, five have been recorded in UK waters. They are the leatherback, loggerhead, Kemp's ridley, green and hawksbill turtles. The leatherback, the largest marine turtle, is the species most frequently recorded in UK waters. Leatherbacks have a flexible, leathery shell and are unique among reptiles in that they are able to metabolically raise their body temperature above that of their immediate environment, allowing them to survive in colder waters. Each summer leatherbacks migrate to UK waters where they feed on jellyfish. The other four species have hard shells and are less frequently encountered in UK waters, where they usually occur as stray juveniles carried by currents from warmer seas.

**LEATHERBACK TURTLE**  
(*Dermochelys coriacea*)  
Most frequently recorded species in UK waters.  
LENGTH: up to 2.91 metres.  
COLOUR: black, spotted with white.  
DISTINCTIVE FEATURES: large, up to 916 kg, pronounced longitudinal ridges on shell, which tapers to a blunt spike.

**KEMP’S RIDLEY TURTLE**  
(*Lepidochelys kempii*)  
LENGTH: up to 1 metre, but usually juveniles (0.3-0.5 metres) occur in UK waters.  
COLOUR: grey/olive.  
DISTINCTIVE FEATURES: shell width equal to or greater than shell length.

**GREEN TURTLE**  
(*Chelonia mydas*)  
LENGTH: up to 1.5 metres.  
COLOUR: adults dark olive or grey with dark blotches, juveniles have chestnut coloured shell.  
DISTINCTIVE FEATURES: smooth shell, rounded facial profile (not angular).

**HAWKSBILL TURTLE**  
(*Eretmochelys imbricata*)  
LENGTH: up to 1.2 metres.  
COLOUR: brown, amber and black tortoiseshell pattern.  
DISTINCTIVE FEATURES: shell scales overlapping, narrow tapered head with bird-like beak. Largely tropical distribution, rarely encountered in UK waters.

**LOGGERHEAD TURTLE**  
(*Caretta caretta*)  
LENGTH: adults up to 1.5 metres, but usually juveniles (0.3-0.5 metres) occur in UK waters.  
COLOUR: reddish brown.  
DISTINCTIVE FEATURES: large head, juveniles have small spikes along spine of shell.

**MARINE TURTLES ARE THREATENED**  
In UK waters threats include:  
- **Accidental entanglement in fishing gear.** Although turtles can dive to great depths, they become stressed and drown when trapped underwater by fishing gear. Fishing gear discarded at sea may also entangle and kill turtles.  
- **Marine litter,** especially plastic, which turtles mistake for jellyfish. Once ingested, plastic can block a turtle's gut leading to starvation.  
- **Boat collisions.** Turtles often bask and must surface regularly to breathe, leaving them vulnerable to boat strike.  

PLEASE BE VIGILANT, AND DO NOT DISCARD FISHING GEAR OR LITTER AT SEA.