

# LEATHERBACK TURTLES

## Did You Know?



Leatherback turtles lived on the earth even before the dinosaurs existed.



Leatherbacks are endangered animals and may become extinct. People are the biggest threat to their survival. Other predators are sharks and killer whales.



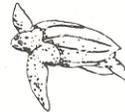
Out of each one thousand leatherback eggs that are laid, only one turtle is thought to reach adulthood.



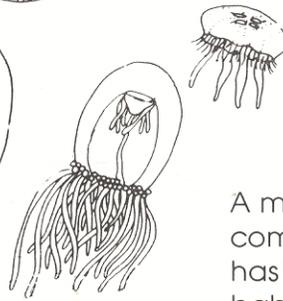
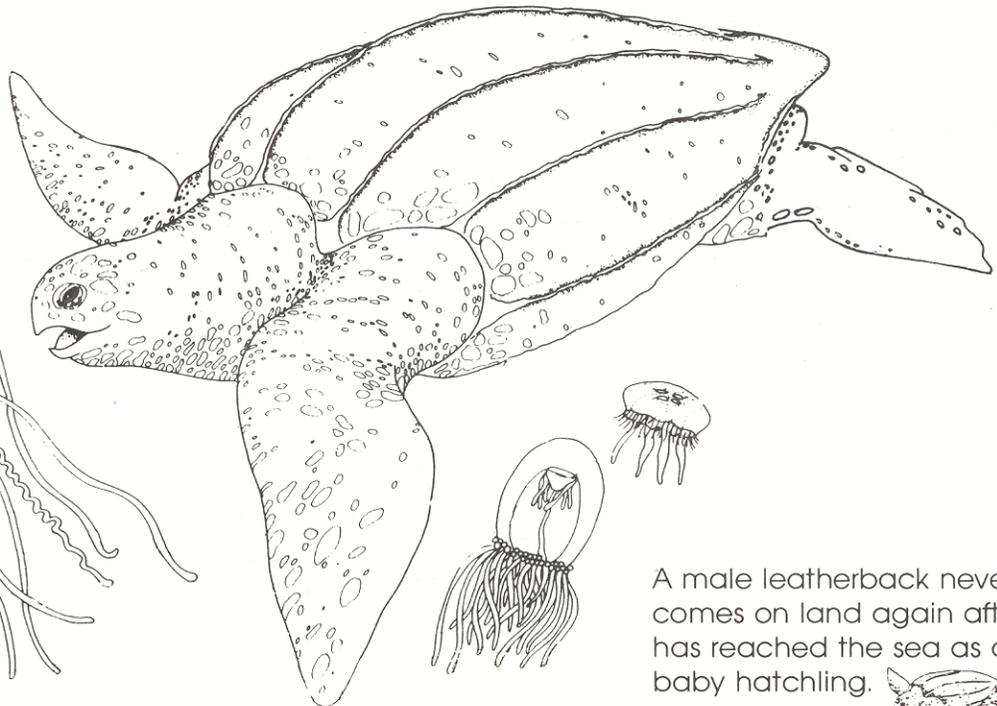
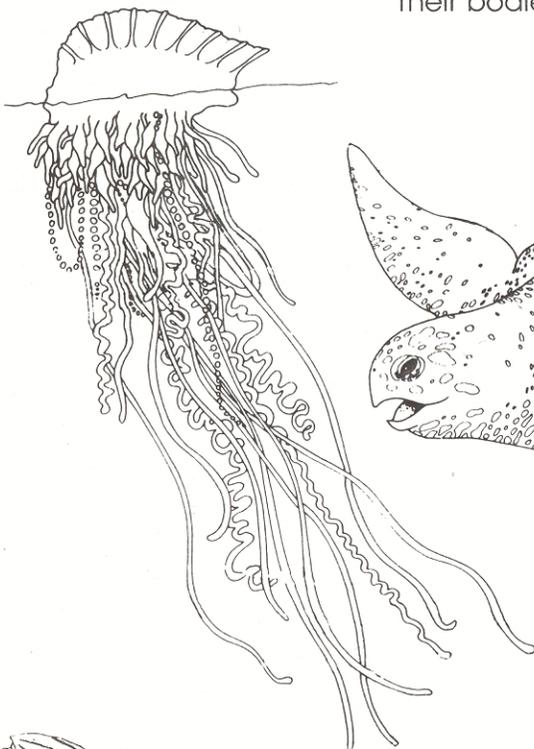
No one knows how long leatherbacks live.



Leatherbacks shed "tears" from special ducts near their eyes that help to remove excess salt from their bodies.



Leatherbacks are one of the deepest diving air-breathing animals in the world.



A male leatherback never comes on land again after it has reached the sea as a baby hatchling.



A leatherback hatchling increases its weight roughly 6,000 times before it becomes an adult turtle (people increase their weight only about 18 times from birth to maturity).



Leatherbacks need air to breathe; they will drown if they get trapped under water.



Hatchlings know where the sea is by the lighter sky of the horizon. If there is a bright light shining on the land they can become confused and go towards that instead.

## Time to Wonder: Questions for the Classroom



Little is known about where baby leatherback hatchlings go once they reach the sea. Adult leatherbacks have been seen in northern seas (Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, etc.), but young turtles are almost never seen. Where do you think they go while they grow up?



Leatherbacks are one of the deepest diving air-breathing animals. They may reach depths of 4,000 feet or so. Why do you think they dive so deep? How do you think their body stands the enormous pressure?



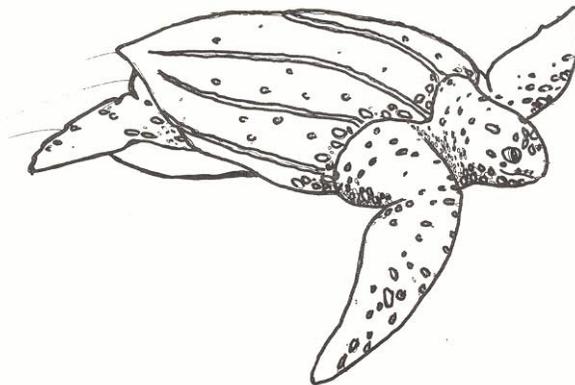
Scientists would like to be able to put tags on the baby hatchlings so they could get information on where the hatchlings go and how long it takes them to grow into adults. So far no tag has been found that is big enough to stay on an adult but that does not hinder the tiny hatchling. How do you think hatchlings could be tagged?



Leatherback turtles have lived on the earth for over 150 million years. This means they were alive before the dinosaurs existed and are one of the most successful animals to have ever lived. In the last 200 years, their numbers have dwindled and now they are in danger of becoming extinct. Can you think why?



When leatherback eggs are laid in the sand, the sex of the undeveloped hatchling has not been determined. It is the temperature surrounding the eggs as the hatchlings develop that determines which hatchling will be male or female. If a nest is laid deep in the sand it will experience the cooler temperatures which nurture male hatchlings. A shallower nest will be warmer and is likely to produce more females. This makes it possible for all the hatchlings from one nest to be of one sex. How do leatherbacks benefit from this process? Do you think that there are equal numbers of male and female leatherback turtles?



*For more information on these amazing creatures, call: The Division of Fish and Wildlife at 775-6762 (St. Thomas) or 772-1955 (St. Croix); or the University of the Virgin Islands, Cooperative Extension Service at 778-0246 (St. Croix) or 774-0210 (St. Thomas).*