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Save Sea Turtles with Eco Seafood

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Sea turtles have been gracing our oceans for hundreds of thousands of years. At Hearts, we cannot imagine our planet without these magnificent creatures! Education is our passion, so we want to help you explore the plight of sea turtles and how you can help them. We hope this guide to saving turtles from extinction will help you use your purchasing power to keep them gracing our seas for generations to come. As Michelle (our intrepid president) once expressed it; “Just speaking to my circle of friends and seeing their eyes light up with new awareness reminds me that many people really care but just don’t know. I love seeing how motivated they are to make changes now that they have new knowledge and awareness.” We hope your eyes will light up and your heart will open to turtles!

Quick Guide: What’s Threatening Sea Turtles Worldwide

- **We need turtles:** Turtles help maintain the health of sea grass beds and coral reefs, which in turn provide food for other marine species including tuna, shrimp, and lobster. Without turtles, our oceans will not survive.^[i]
- **All sea turtles are threatened!** There are two main types of turtles: Dermochelyidae, which is comprised of a single species, the leatherback; and Cheloniidae, which includes the six species of hard-shelled sea turtles.^[ii] All seven species of sea turtles are in great danger of becoming extinct.
- **Unsustainable seafood threats to turtles:** Commercial fishing and shrimp trawling are the biggest threats.^[iii] Turtles become caught in gill and shrimp nets, ultimately drowning, after which they are tragically referred to as “bycatch.”
- **10,000s of sea turtles die in nets annually:** The problem of bycatch contributes to the deaths 1,000s to 10,000s of sea turtles each year.^[iv] 4,600 sea turtles die annually in US fisheries alone.^[v]
- **Turtle excluder devices (TEDs) save lives:** These devices allow turtles to escape the nets and drastically lower the risk of turtle bycatch, though this has been hard to enforce, especially outside of the US and other developed countries.
- **Ocean plastic pollution trash kills turtles:** Sea turtles ingest fishing gear and petroleum by-products, and can become tangled in plastic debris.^[vi] All of these pollution threats can be fatal.
- **Egg poaching and turtle survival:** Mother turtles crawl up the beach, dig deep into the sand with their back legs, and bury their eggs. Yet every year, humans poach the eggs and kill the mothers, both of which are eaten as delicacies in regions such as Malaysia and Costa Rica
- **Climate change and turtle challenges:** Global warming contributes to rising sea levels which erodes beaches and sea turtle nesting habitat.^[vii]

Take Action! Reduce Sea Turtle Endangerment

1. **Buy certified sustainable seafood:** There are several seafood and [shrimp certifications](#) that work to protect marine creatures like turtles. You can find them by looking for the “dolphin-safe” label (which indicates fisheries that utilize TEDs) using Monterey Bay’s [seafood search](#), carrying their [pocket seafood watch guide](#) with you to restaurants, or downloading their [Seafood Watch app for android and iPhone](#). Another option is the blue [Marine Stewardship Council \(MSC\) ecolabel](#), which identifies sustainable fishing practices, including certified trawlers that use TEDs. Go further and sign this [Pledge to Eat Only Sea Turtle-Safe Seafood](#), and ask your favorite restaurants and grocers to sign the pledge, too.
2. **Protect coastlines while on vacation:** Turtles return to the same nesting beaches every year, so preserving these beaches is crucial. When on vacation, stay in hotels that support sea turtle conservation efforts. Start by checking to see where turtles nest using the State of the World’s Sea Turtles project [Sea Map](#). If nesting beaches are close to your destination, ask hotel managers if they have programs to protect the turtles and their eggs. When you get there, take care to protect beaches, never drive on them, and be sure to keep your pets on leashes to protect turtle eggs.
3. **Take a turtle protection voluntourism vacation!** Take it one step further by [volunteering for conservation of nesting beaches](#) with a sea turtle conservation project to get hands-on experience helping sea turtles!
4. **Don’t eat or use turtle products:** Never purchase vacation souvenir turtle shells, jewelry, or trinkets, and always refuse to eat turtle flesh or turtle eggs. Here are more tips on [turtle-friendly tourism](#) from Seeturtles.org.
5. **Reduce plastic pollution on beaches:** Of course, never leave your litter on the beach. More importantly, reduce your consumption of plastics by practicing recycling, reducing, and reusing habits. This will vastly lower your contribution to the Great Pacific Ocean Plastic Island, which threatens many types of marine life, including turtles.

6. **Adopt a turtle:** Conservation organizations need financial help to continue their work of protecting vulnerable species like our precious turtles. Adopting a sea turtle through the [World Wildlife Fund](#) or [Seaturtle.org](#) is a great way to demonstrate your desire to protect wildlife.

7. **Support the Global Conservation Act:** Tell your political representatives that you want to help earth's biodiversity flourish and that in order to do that, the world needs the Global Conservation Act. WWF's [Conservation Action Network](#) has all of the information you need to take action.

Dig Deeper: How to Preserve Sea Turtle Populations

- The world of seafood certifications is constantly changing – follow the [SeaTurtles.org news](#) to keep an eye on the development of an eco-labeling campaign for turtle-safe shrimp and seafood.
- Find out more about the biggest threats to turtles and what you can do via [See Turtles](#).
- Check out this [list of sea turtle](#) species to learn which are endangered, threatened, and so on via the NOAA.
- Learn more about how [millions of sea turtles are captured and killed by fisheries](#) via DiscoveryNews.
- Find out what your government is doing for endangered species. For instance, Congress attempted to change section 403 of ESA so that turtle excluder devices would no longer be required.^[viii] The ESA faces possible amendments again in the near future. [Turtles.org](#) will keep you up to date.

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