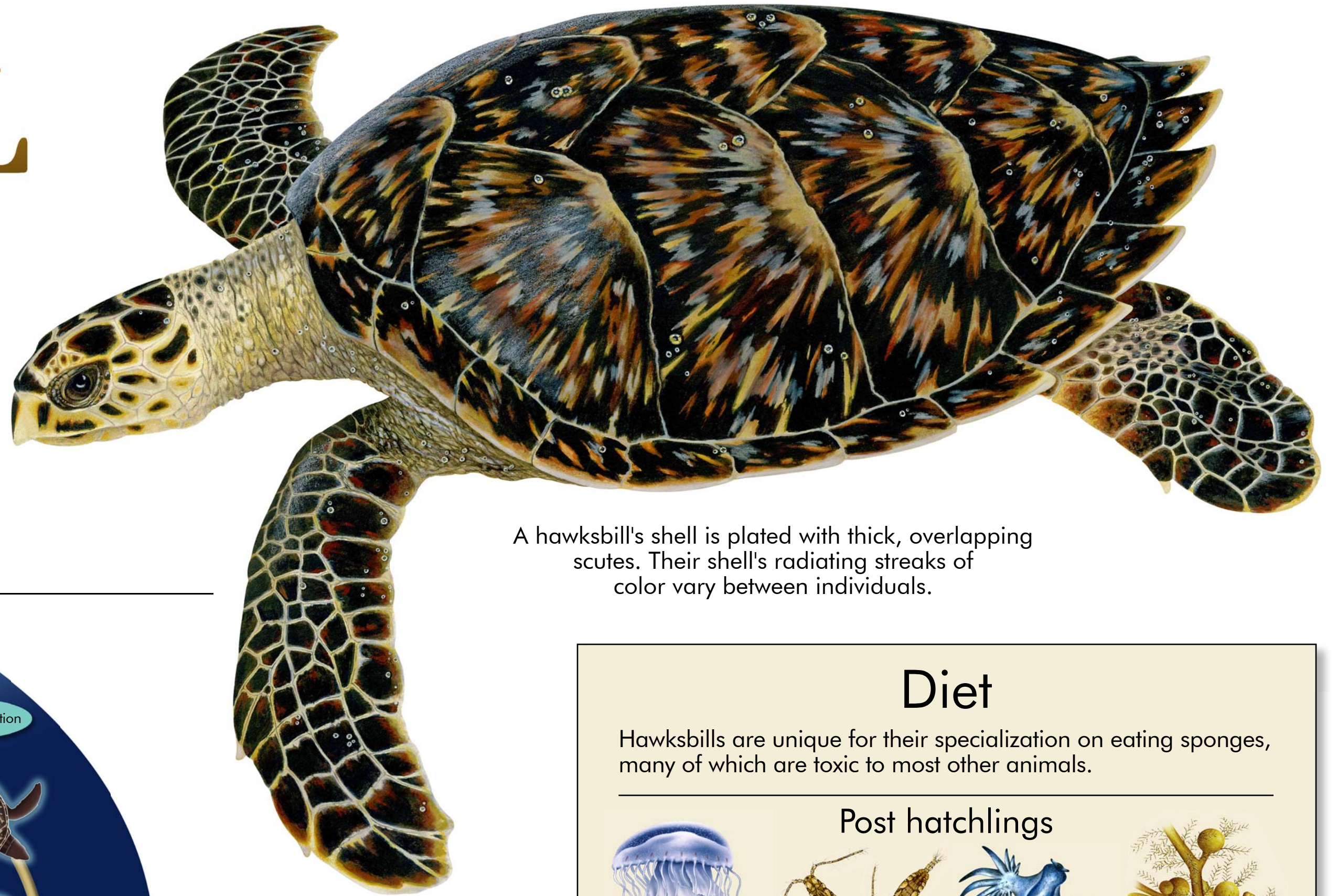


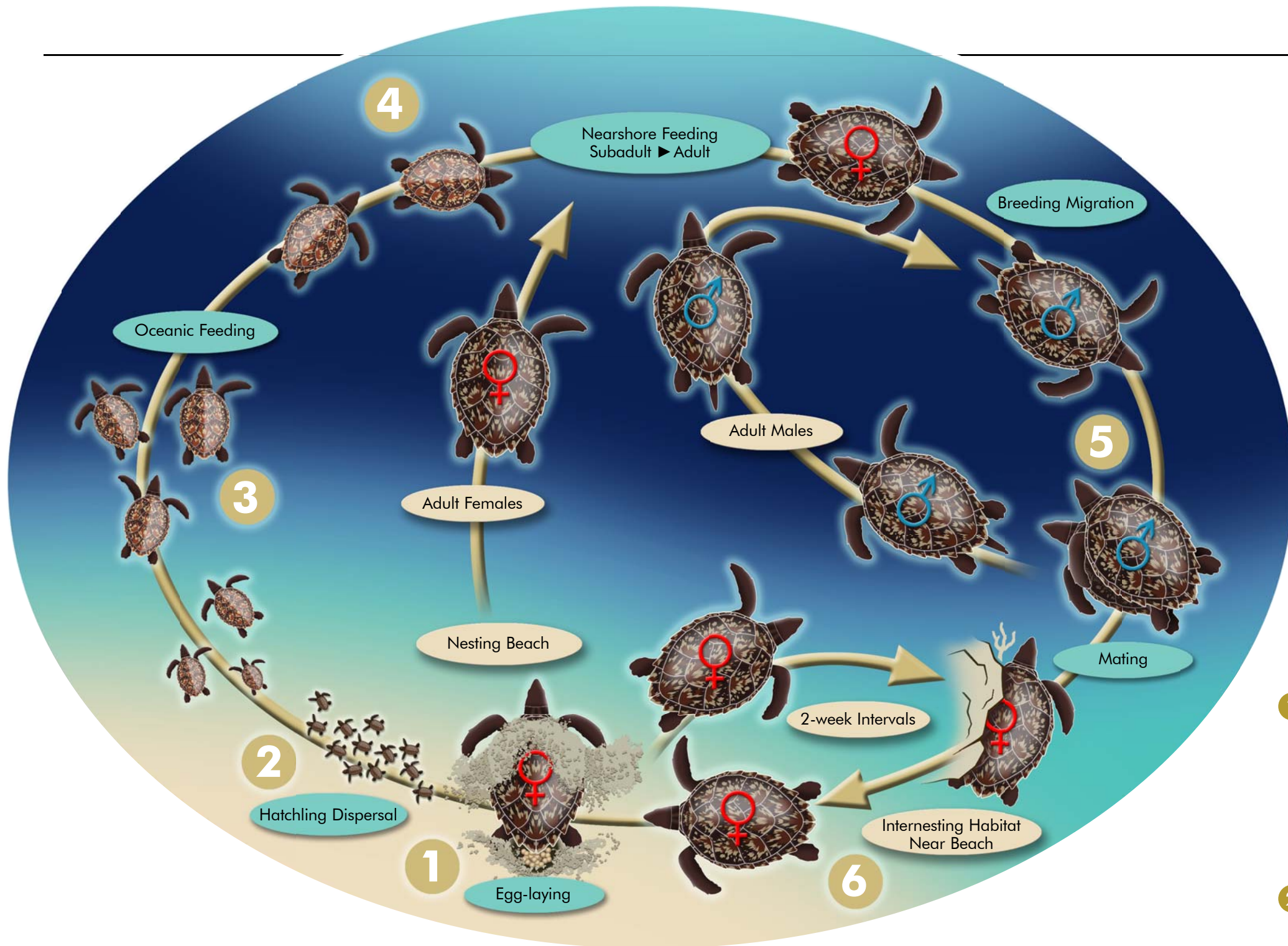
# HAWKSBILL TURTLE

*Eretmochelys imbricata*

This sea turtle of tropical reefs has become rare throughout its range. Although the hawksbill's center of abundance in the Atlantic is the Caribbean Sea, important groups of juvenile hawksbills feed on reefs in southern Florida and the Keys. Hawksbills are named for their narrow, slightly hooked beak.



A hawksbill's shell is plated with thick, overlapping scutes. Their shell's radiating streaks of color vary between individuals.

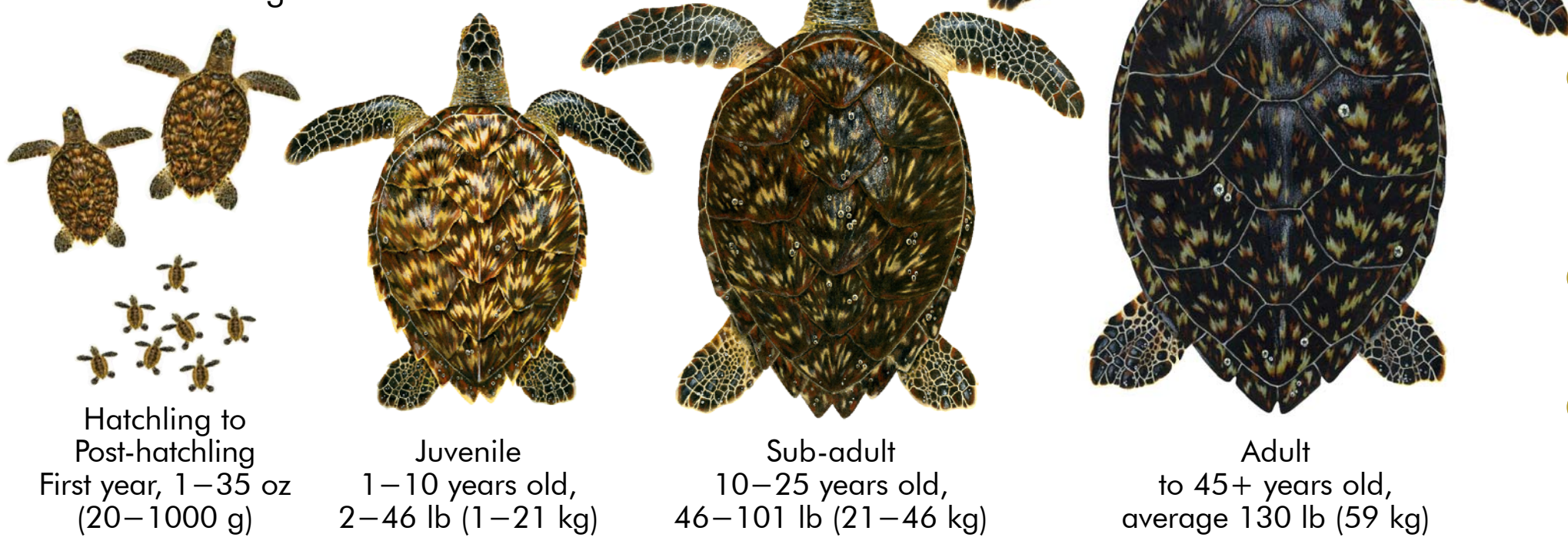


## Life Cycle

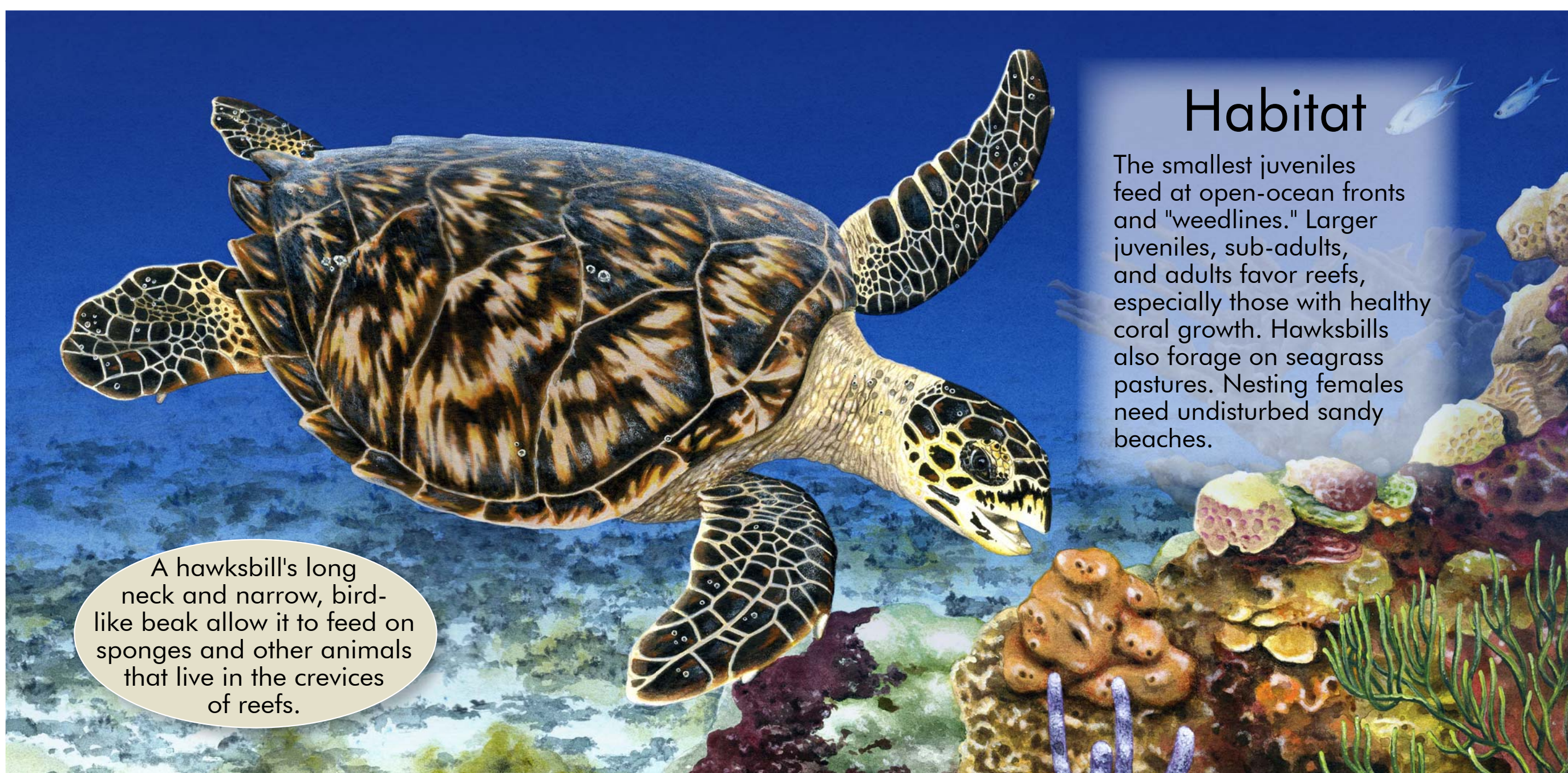
Hawksbills progress as they mature, but apart from their breeding migrations, adults tend to remain within a familiar home range.

- 1 Eggs average 140 per clutch and incubate under sand in beach nests for roughly 55–75 days. Warmer turtles produce mostly female turtles and cooler results result in mostly males.
- 2 A few days after escaping from their eggs, hatchlings emerge together from the nest at night, scramble quickly to the sea, and swim from land almost constantly for more than a day.
- 3 The youngest juveniles live near the surface of deep ocean waters and are carried by ocean currents.
- 4 At about two years of age, juveniles swim into nearshore waters to inhabit reefs and other shallow habitats. Subadults may occupy deeper reefs.
- 5 Adults mate along migration routes between foraging and nesting areas and off the nesting beach.
- 6 Every 2–4 years, adult females migrate to the beach where they hatched and make about 3–6 nests at two-week intervals.

**Nesting/hatching season:** Varies by location  
**Adult shell length:** 28–35 in (71–89 cm)  
**Adult weight:** 101–154 lb (46–70 kg)  
**Age at maturity:** Approximately 25 years  
**Status:** Endangered



Hatchling to Post-hatchling: First year, 1–35 oz (20–1000 g)  
 Juvenile: 1–10 years old, 2–46 lb (1–21 kg)  
 Sub-adult: 10–25 years old, 46–101 lb (21–46 kg)  
 Adult: to 45+ years old, average 130 lb (59 kg)



## Habitat

The smallest juveniles feed at open-ocean fronts and "weed-lines." Larger juveniles, sub-adults, and adults favor reefs, especially those with healthy coral growth. Hawksbills also forage on seagrass pastures. Nesting females need undisturbed sandy beaches.

A hawksbill's long neck and narrow, bird-like beak allow it to feed on sponges and other animals that live in the crevices of reefs.

### Diet

Hawksbills are unique for their specialization on eating sponges, many of which are toxic to most other animals.

**Post hatchlings**

- Jelly animals
- Copepods
- Sea slugs
- Hydroids

**Juveniles and Adults**

- Sponges
- Coral anemones
- Algae

### Natural Predators

Although eggs and small hawksbills have many natural predators, large hawksbills have few.

**Eggs and Hatchlings**

- Coatimundi
- Black vulture
- Ghost crab

**Post Hatchlings**

- Frigatebird
- Predatory fish

**Juveniles and Adults**

- Large sharks

### Conservation

Populations rely on international cooperation. Conservation efforts include projects to monitor and safeguard nesting beaches, and international agreements to limit tortoiseshell trade and protect coral reef habitat.

## Nesting

Females take about an hour to dig a bay pit and egg chamber, lay their eggs, and scatter sand to camouflage their nest.



## Tracks

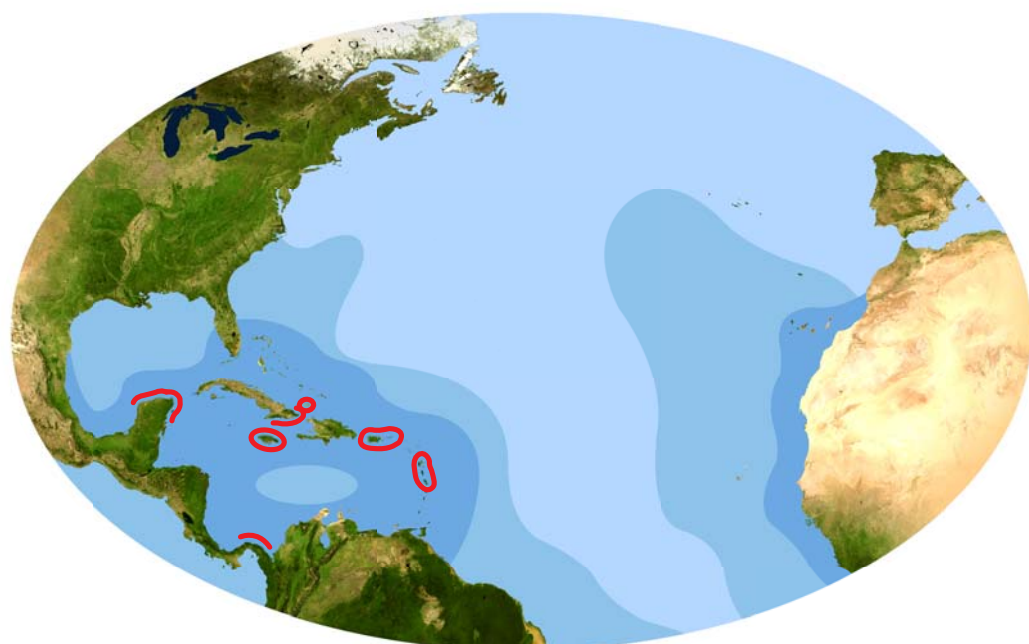
Alternating rear-flipper swirls are at the margin, and a wavy tail-drag line runs down the center.



↳ 24 in (60 cm) ↳

## Distribution

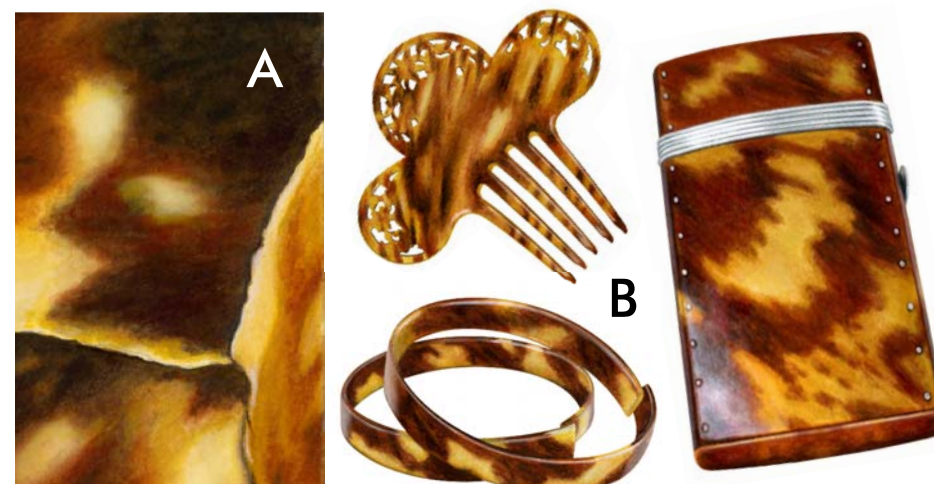
Hawksbill nesting is dispersed throughout the greater Caribbean. The young recieve only a few nests each year. The youngest juveniles live in the open Gulf of Mexico and in deep ocean waters. Larger juveniles, sub-adults, and adults are found in smaller coastal waters.



- Oceanic juveniles
- Large juveniles and adults
- Major nesting beaches

## Threats

**Killing for tortoiseshell** (the turtle's plastic-like shell scutes, A) has taken place in many areas where hawksbills live. The material, also called bekko, is commercially sold and fashioned into decorative items (B).

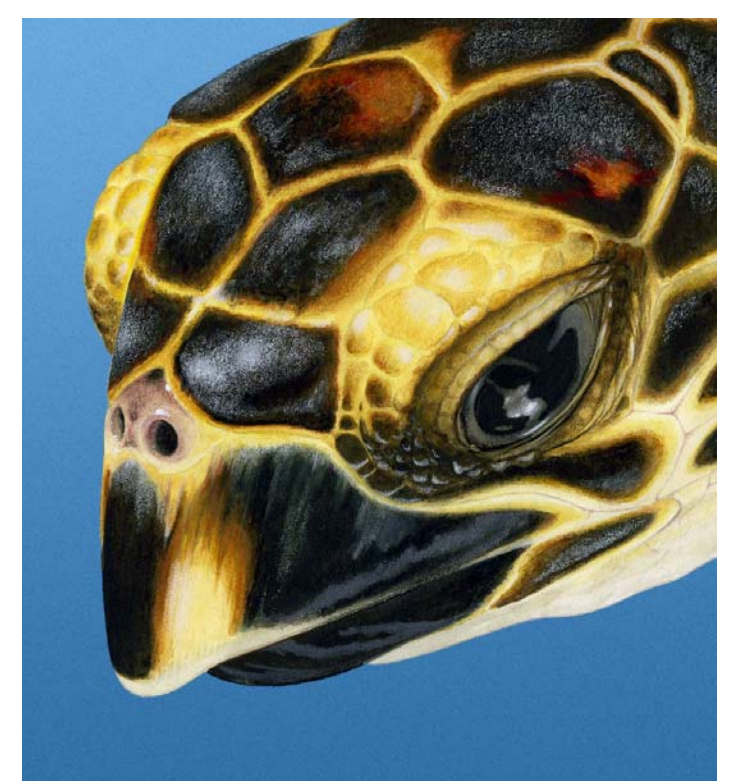


Other important threats:

- Marine plastics are an ingestion hazard
- Light Pollution misleads and kills hatchlings
- Coastal Armoring prevents nesting
- Climate change destroys coral reef habitat
- Fishing Debris entangles and drowns turtles
- Boat Strikes kill and injure turtles

## How to Help

Although hawksbills are international marine animals that need help throughout their range to survive, there are many things we can do for them here at home. Make informed seafood choices, pick up marine litter, never purchase tortoiseshell products, consider beach conservation in tropical vacation decisions, contribute to marine conservation organizations, buy a sea turtle license plate, and share your interest in sea turtles with others.



Celebrating over 50 Years of Sea Turtle Conservation

**Caribbean Conservation Corporation**  
 4424 NW 13th St, Ste B-11, Gainesville, FL 32609  
 1-800-678-7853, ccc@cccturtle.org



Funded by The Sea Turtle Florida Grants Program with proceeds from the sale of the Florida State Turtle License Plate. Learn more at [www.helpingseaturtles.org](http://www.helpingseaturtles.org).