

Hatchling Watching Guide

The little hatchlings look vulnerable because well, they are, especially when it comes to light. They use light horizons to navigate out to sea. If bright artificial light is present, they will get confused and head for that.

They can become lost inland and waste what little energy they have trying to find their way. Here's some simple pointers to make sure both you and the turtles have a great experience.

- Please turn off outside lights and draw your curtains in your room at night during the hatchling season.
- When out with the little guys please remember **NO FLASH PHOTOGRAPHY**. It stresses them out and, as mentioned earlier, light disorients them.
- Turn off your verandah lights at night.
- When you see some hatchlings it's very tempting to pick them up and play with them as they are so cute. Unfortunately though, it really does decrease their chance of survival.



We never get tired of 'talking turtles'.

So, if you'd like to know more about the turtles, drop into the Information Centre and chat to one of our nature guides. We even have special slide-show presentations if you're interested.

During the season, Naturalist Guides will be on the beaches at night to help (it gets dark out there). On moonless nights, the special 3-volt low impact torches are available at the Information Centre.



Heron Island's Turtle Season.
How you can help our turtles.

Welcome to Heron Island. We love having visitors on the island and not all of them are human. In fact, most aren't.

Every year, between November and March, Heron Island plays host to nesting Green and Loggerhead turtles. Their feeding grounds can be thousands of kilometers away but they always return to the same place for nesting. No one really knows how long they have been coming to the island, but we do know it was long before we arrived.



After the turtles come ashore to lay their eggs, it's not long before the hatchlings emerge from the sand and begin their dash to the ocean. That 'hatchling season' generally runs from January through to May.

No trip to Heron Island would be complete without getting out and seeing our favourite visitors in their natural habitat. There are of course a few guidelines that will ensure both you and the turtles enjoy the experience.

Have Fun.

Turtle Nesting

Soon after mating, female turtles come ashore and lay their first 'clutch' of eggs above the high tide line. Then she finds a suitable spot and sets about creating an egg chamber using her flippers. When complete, she lays her eggs



(an average of 120) in the chamber before covering it up and heading out to sea. Being turtles, nothing happens that fast, the whole process takes anywhere between 1 and 3 hours.

Turtle Watching Guide

To find a turtle, simply walk along Heron Beach one or two hours after the evening's high tide. Look for the tracks in the sand where the turtle has come in from the sea.

- Light can disturb and disorientate the turtles, minimise the use of torches and be sure to only use 3-volt low impact torches. Please NO FLASH PHOTOGRAPHY either.
- When you see a turtle moving up or down the beach stay still, excessive movement can disturb her. And remember to never walk in front of them, walk behind.
- If the turtles feel threatened or disturbed, they will actually turn around and head back out to sea and not lay their eggs. Try not to approach them.



- If you come upon a turtle while digging, give her some room. Sit down quietly behind the turtle and at least 10 metres away (a girl needs her privacy). Once she has finished digging, wait at least 15 minutes, then you may approach her from behind.
- The turtles are quite stressed and tired after their nights work, so again, give her some room (10 metres) so as not to panic her.

Turtle Hatching

OK, this is the really cute part. The baby turtles (hatchlings) emerge from their sandy nest and quite literally scurry to sea. It's an amazing sight to see and something kids will never forget. The hatchlings are faster than their mother (which isn't hard) and generally can make it to sea in only a few minutes.

A single 'clutch' of hatchlings can consist of up to 120 little hatchlings and they all emerge from the nest at the same time. It can be like peak hour if a few clutches emerge at once, so watch your feet!