



Leatherback turtle stranded in a beach in Malaga, Spain

LEATHERBACK TURTLE, *Dermochelys coriacea*

The leatherback turtle is a species with a cosmopolitan global range with distinct populations in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The population in the Atlantic Ocean ranges across the entire region, including the Mediterranean Sea. Leatherback turtles occur in the Atlantic ocean, from tropical countries such as Guyana in South America and Gabon in central Africa, to the cold waters of Alaska which they can tolerate due to their capacity for thermoregulation. Large adult leatherbacks may have a carapace 180 cm long, with a flipper-span of 270 cm and weight 500 kg, although the largest ever recorded had a carapace 291 cm long and weighed 916 kg. They can dive for as long as an hour to depths as much as 1000 m.

Leatherbacks have been recorded in waters of all Mediterranean countries and have been known since ancient times. However, they are probably under-represented in historical accounts as they were never commercially exploited and are difficult to transport in fishing boats due to their great size. Reports mainly derive from dead, stranded animals. Most reports suggest that they have been rare but regular visitors throughout the region.

Leatherbacks are the most pelagic of the sea turtles. Individuals nesting in the north-west Atlantic typically migrate east to feed off the west coast of Europe and North Africa, mainly between 30° and 45° north. In summer and autumn, they typically travel further north, between the