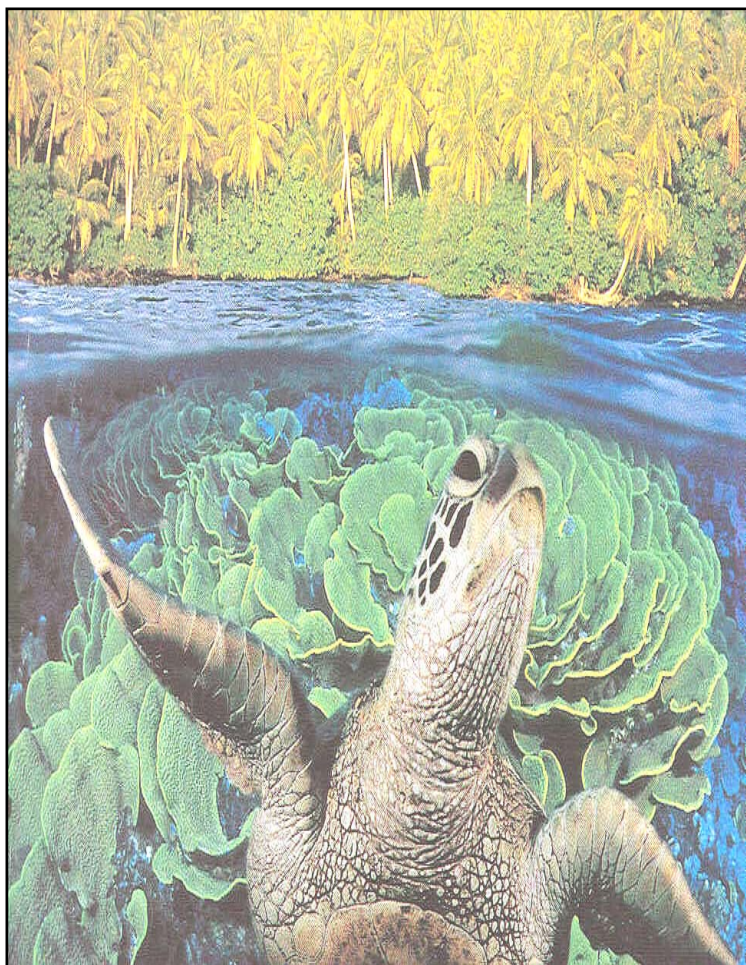


Pacific leatherback turtles face extinction



There will soon be no leatherback turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*) left in the Pacific Ocean, according to Drexel University environmental science professor Dr. James Spotila and his colleagues. Following a 12-year study, these findings appear today in the "Brief Communications" section of the June issue of the journal *Nature*.

✎ The team's findings are based on a survey of the nesting population of leatherbacks in Playa Grande, Costa Rica - the world's fourth largest colony of the species. Using the colony, Spotila and team constructed a mathematical model of future population trends. According to Spotila, this population is "in the midst of a collapse." The number of nesting females has fallen from 1,367 in 1988-89 to 117 in 1998-99. Each year, about one-third of the population dies after falling prey to fishing nets or lines. Spotila and team conclude that unless there are serious changes to fishing practices in the Pacific, there will be fewer

than 50 nesting females in the entire ocean by 2004.

- ✎ The world's largest turtle, the leatherback weighs roughly 800 lbs. Oceanic by nature, the leatherbacks approach land only during breeding season. Most breed every other year and lay clutches of eggs totaling between 80 to 100 at roughly 10-day intervals before returning seaward.
- ✎ Excerpt from the article: "The dwindling numbers of leatherback turtles are signaling a threat to biodiversity in the oceans. A mathematical model based on our assessment of a once-large leatherback population predicts that unsustainable adult mortality, apparently due to human fishing activity, will soon drive this population to extinction."

How Can You Help!

- ❑ **Do not harass sea turtles at sea or on land.**
- ❑ **Do not approach turtles while you are diving or snorkeling.**
- ❑ **Do not trample on or break living coral.**
- ❑ **Do not anchor in reef or sea grass areas.**
- ❑ **Do not discard plastic or other waste at sea. Plastic bags, mistaken for jellyfish and ingested, can kill sea turtles.**
- ❑ **Do not disturb nesting turtles. They are sensitive to movements on the beach, noise and especially lights. If you see a sea turtle, please report the sighting to the nearest dive shop.**
- ❑ **If you notice any illegal activity (turtle capture or sale of turtle eggs, meat, shells), please inform the local police.**