



SAADIYAT ISLAND

BEACH PATROL BASICS



BEFORE YOU BEGIN



HEALTH AND SAFETY

SAFETY

Avoid taking unnecessary risks when responding to emergencies or interacting with wildlife. Do not touch things unless it's strictly necessary.

PROTECTION

Use gloves, and other tools at your disposal.

DISTANCE

Approach wildlife cautiously some animals, such as sea snakes, may be dangerous if mishandled.

HYDRATION

Carry water, wear sunscreen, and use a hat to protect yourself from the sun. Stop if you start to feel dizzy.

DOUBLE CHECK

Watch for slippery surfaces, sharp objects, or other hazards when walking near the shoreline.

REPORT

If a situation feels unsafe, step back and report it immediately to the relevant authorities.



TURTLES OF THE UAE

Identification



The UAE's coastal waters are vital habitats for species of sea turtles in particular: the **Green Sea Turtle** and the **Hawksbill Sea Turtle**. Both species play crucial roles in maintaining the health of marine ecosystems, but they face significant threats, such as habitat destruction, pollution, and accidental capture.

Green Sea Turtles

(Chelonia mydas)

The Green Sea Turtle is one of the largest sea turtles, named for the greenish tint of its body fat rather than its shell.

While their populations are relatively stable in some regions, they are listed as Endangered due to threats like habitat loss, poaching, and entanglement in fishing nets.

Key Identifying Features:

Size: Up to 1.5 meters and 250 kg.

Shell: Olive to brown, smooth.

Beak: Blunt.



Hawksbill Sea Turtles

(Eretmochelys imbricata)

The Hawksbill Sea Turtle is easily identified by its sharp, pointed beak and striking, patterned shell.

Sadly, Hawksbill turtles are Critically Endangered, mainly due to poaching for their shells, loss of nesting habitats, and accidental capture in fishing gear.

Key Identifying Features:

Size: Up to 1 meter and 80 kg.

Shell: Amber and brown, overlapping.

Beak: Sharp, pointed (Hawk-like).



ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Hawksbill sea turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) have been nesting on Saadiyat Beach for generations, returning each year to lay their eggs. These turtles are a **critically endangered** species, and their global population has declined significantly due to habitat loss, pollution, accidental entanglement in fishing gear, and climate change. Their nesting populations remain low, making every successful nest crucial to their survival!

While sightings can be rare, each patrol plays an important role in collecting valuable data, protecting nests, and ensuring hatchlings have the **best chance of reaching the sea**.

This guide outlines your responsibilities and provides essential protocols for monitoring nesting activity, identifying and protecting nests, and assisting hatchlings. While most situations can be managed using these guidelines, you may occasionally encounter unexpected circumstances. In such cases, it is important to seek expert guidance before taking action.

By following the best practices in this guide, you contribute to the conservation of Saadiyat's nesting turtles and help protect a species that has been a part of our oceans for millions of years!



KEY INDICATORS

Hawksbill sea turtles typically nest between **March and June**, with females coming ashore at night to lay their eggs. The cool, quiet hours of darkness provide the ideal conditions for nesting, with minimal human activity.

Although we rarely see the turtles themselves as they emerge from the sea or nest, the following morning, their tracks in the sand provide evidence of their activity!



Female turtles usually prefer quieter stretches of beach, **above the high tide** line, where they can dig a hole in the dry sand to lay their eggs. Identifying a turtle nest on Saadiyat Beach is a crucial part of your patrol. Once a female turtle has laid her eggs, she covers the nest with sand to conceal it from predators. After covering the nest with sand, the turtle returns to the sea.



TURTLE TRACKS

What to look for:

Turtle tracks are often the first sign that a nesting turtle has visited the beach. Identifying these tracks is key to locating nests and monitoring the nesting process. Here's what to look for when you're patrolling the beach for turtle tracks:

DIRECTION OF MOVEMENT:

The tracks typically show a clear direction—from the water towards the dunes where the turtle has nested.

Turtle tracks can resemble large, uneven tire tracks, but unlike vehicle tracks, they are rarely straight or parallel. Instead, they tend to curve and have a more irregular shape!

The tracks will start at the **high tide line** or just above it and move upwards towards the dry sand. Sometimes, you may notice multiple tracks if the turtle has turned around or struggled to find a suitable nesting spot.

SHAPE AND SIZE:

The tracks are usually wider than a human footprint, depending on the turtle's size.

But in general, Hawksbill turtle tracks will be around 70 to 90 cm wide.



TURTLE TRACKS

What to look for:

DISTINCT FLIPPERS:

Look for two distinct sets of impressions: The front flippers typically make **larger, broader impressions**, while the back flippers leave **narrower, smaller tracks** that may appear more curved! You can also spot the tail drag in the tracks.



WHERE TO LOOK FOR TRACKS:

- **Near the High Tide Line:** This is the starting point where the turtle begins its crawl.
- **Up the Slope of the Beach:** The tracks will lead from the water to the higher, drier areas of the beach where the turtle will find a suitable spot to dig a nest.
- **Avoiding Obstacles:** Turtles often seek smooth, clear areas to dig their nests. Look for tracks in areas that are free from obstacles like large rocks.

TURTLE NESTS

What to look for:

Identifying **sea turtle nests** is a critical task for monitoring the nesting process and ensuring the protection of eggs. Once a female turtle has laid her eggs and covered the nest, there are specific signs to look for to help you recognize and document the nest site. Here's what to look for when identifying a sea turtle nest:

EVIDENCE OF TURTLE TRACKS

The tracks leading up to the nest site are one of the best indicators that a turtle has nested there.

These tracks, made by the turtle's front and back flippers, will usually show the path from the water's edge to the nesting area!

Tracks are typically wider than human footprints, with a distinctive uneven or **zigzag pattern**.



DEPRESSION OR MOUND IN THE SAND:

After a turtle lays her eggs, she will use her flippers to cover the nest with sand. The result is often a **slightly raised mound or depression** in the sand, where the nest has been buried.

The size of the mound or depression can vary depending on the size of the turtle and the depth of the nest.

This area might look disturbed compared to its surroundings!



TURTLE NESTS

What to look for:

NO VISIBLE EGGS

Unlike some animals, sea turtle eggs are **not visible** on the surface! After laying her eggs, the female turtle will cover the hole with sand, leaving no visible trace of the eggs.

If you do find visible eggs on the surface, this might indicate a predator disturbance or an incomplete nest. The eggs are round, slightly leathery, and about the size of a golf ball. The nest usually contains around 100-150 eggs.

In general, if you see eggs on the surface, it's a sign that the nest may need further monitoring or intervention.



SIZE OF THE NEST

The size of the nest can vary depending on the species and the size of the turtle, but on average, sea turtle nests can be 50-80 cm deep.

The hole will often be large enough to fit a handful of eggs, but not so large that it appears like a dug-up hole!



FALSE CRAWL

While identifying real sea turtle nests is critical to their protection, it's equally important to recognize **false crawls**—signs that may look like a nesting attempt but are not associated with an actual nest.

- **Tracks:** The tracks leading up to the beach may look similar to a true nesting event but are typically incomplete or disturbed. There may be a clear track of the turtle moving toward the shore and sometimes a body pit where she tried to dig!
- **No Nest Depression:** A false nest does not contain a depression or hole with eggs.
- **Signs of Abandonment:** The turtle might appear to have abandoned the site shortly after attempting to dig or after coming ashore, leaving behind disturbed sand but no eggs.
- **Tracks Going Back to the Water:** A false crawl often ends with the turtle heading back to the sea without having laid any eggs, like a U-turn!



NEST REPORTING

MARK THE AREA CAREFULLY

Immediately mark the area around the nest carefully, be careful not to damage the nest or the surrounding area.

TAKE PHOTOS

Capture clear photos of the nest and the surrounding area, but make sure to avoid stepping on the tracks or disturbing the nest in any way!



REPORT IT

Contact **Dr. Hind Al Ameri** from the Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi directly at **+971 50-712-2552** to report the nest and get further instructions.

You can also reach out to Patrol Leader **Cynthia Harb**, **+971 50 532 3994**

PROVIDE A CLEAR LOCATION

When reporting the nest, provide as much detail as possible, including the exact GPS location, time of day, and any visible tracks or disturbances you noticed.

DO NOT DISTURB THE AREA

Avoid touching the nest, the eggs, or the surrounding sand. Do not attempt to dig or relocate the nest. Stay nearby but keep a safe distance from the nest, making sure to avoid disturbing the area. If you're able, observe any activity around the nest but remain as unobtrusive as possible.

HATCHLINGS



Once the eggs hatch, the **tiny turtles** make their way from the nest to the ocean, usually at night to avoid predators! Some nests hatch without any warning, so we may simply find their footprints. Hatchling tracks look like miniature versions of the adult footprints! It's important for us to know what to do if we encounter hatchlings on their way to the water.

DO NOT TOUCH OR HANDLE

Avoid touching or handling the hatchling! It's important that they find their way to the sea naturally. Excessive human interaction can disrupt their natural behaviors.

Watch the hatchling from a safe distance. If you're on the beach, make sure the path is clear of obstacles that might prevent the hatchling from reaching the ocean.



REPORT IT

Take photos without disturbing the hatchling, and share the location, time, and any details with **Dr. Hind Al Ameri** from the Environment Agency - Abu Dhabi directly at **+971 50-712-2552** or reach out to Patrol Leader **Cynthia Harb**, **+971 50 532 3994**.



STRANDED TURTLES

Identification and Reporting

Sea turtles are among the most vulnerable marine species and often face challenges like entanglement, injuries from boat strikes, or sickness that lead to strandings. Knowing how to identify and respond to a stranded turtle is essential for its survival.

If you find a turtle on the beach that is neither a hatchling nor a nesting female, it is likely unwell and requires specialist care. Sick turtles often become lethargic, struggle to swim efficiently, and may have barnacles on their shells, which can weigh them down and slow them further.

This often leads to them washing ashore.

If the turtle is alive, it must be transported to a turtle rehabilitation center as soon as possible to increase its chances of survival. The nearest turtle rehabilitation facility to Saadiyat Island is **The National Aquarium in Abu Dhabi**.

By responding quickly and following the appropriate steps, you can significantly improve a stranded turtle's chances of survival and contribute to conservation efforts for these remarkable marine creatures!



OH NO! YOU FOUND A STRANDED SEA TURTLE

TAKE PHOTOS FROM MULTIPLE ANGLES AND RECORD THE LOCATION

TINY HATCHLING
(<10 cm)

IS IT ALIVE?

YES

Is it actively crawling and moving its fins?

YES

Pick up the turtle and put it in the sea.

NO!



NO!

Put it in a container and arrange for it to go to **The National Aquarium**.

NOTE:

Document and report any jet skis or boats nearby that may have caused a disturbance!

REPORTING!

Report the condition and location! **Do not** move the turtle unless instructed.

Report the stranding to **The National Aquarium Abu Dhabi**
02 418 6666 for guidance or to notify them of the situation.

And

Notify the nearest hotel / beach club

SMALL JUVENILE
(<50 cm)

Report it to **The National Aquarium** as soon as possible and transport it to the nearest hotel or Beach club on Saadiyat.

If it is covered in barnacles, do not attempt to remove them!

Keep pets, people, and potential predators away.

Ensure the turtle is not disturbed by unnecessary handling or noise.

Ensure you handover the case before leaving the scene.

Do not try to feed the turtle or remove barnacles from its shell!

BEST PRACTICE (ADULTS):

- Use a container that is clean and free from objects!
- It should be large enough to allow it to rest in a normal position.
- If the turtle can lift its head to breathe, gently pour fresh or seawater over its body.
- No container? keep the turtle moist by covering it with a wet towel.

BIG ADULT
(>50 cm)

FIRST, REPORT IT IMMEDIATELY TO THE NATIONAL AQUARIUM AND NOTIFY THE SECURITY AT THE NEAREST HOTEL OR BEACH CLUB.

IS IT ALIVE?

YES

Place it in a ventilated container! Such as a bucket, wooden crate, or cool box if you have one.

IS THE TURTLE ENTANGLED?

NO

YES

Do not attempt to remove any embedded fishing gear or other debris unless explicitly instructed by trained professionals!

Premature removal can do more harm

JET SKI'S

And Other Disturbances

Saadiyat is a designated protected area known for its pristine beaches and rich biodiversity, including critical habitats for sea turtles, dolphins, and other marine life. To preserve this delicate ecosystem, strict regulations are in place regarding motorized water sports and boating activities. These regulations aim to minimize disturbances, reduce the risk of harm to wildlife, and protect the natural beauty of the area.

Motorized activities, like **jet skis** and **boats**, disturb marine life with noise and vibrations that affect feeding, nesting, and migration! Propellers and waves can also damage seagrass beds and harm marine species!

To ensure the preservation of this delicate ecosystem, motorized water sports and boating are strictly prohibited within **2 km** of the beach!

The Environment Agency Abu Dhabi enforces these rules. Visitors and residents are encouraged to assist in conservation efforts by reporting any unauthorized activities within the restricted zone by documenting violations (e.g., photos or registration numbers) and calling **800-555**.

By following these guidelines and respecting the rules, you contribute to preserving Saadiyat's natural beauty and safeguarding the remarkable biodiversity that thrives in its waters!



IMPORTANT CONTACTS

In case you encounter any injured, distressed, or entangled wildlife on Saadiyat Island, it's essential to have the right contacts at hand to report the incident promptly. **Below is a list of important numbers to call for assistance:**

COMPANY	SCOPE	NUMBER
Environment Agency Abu Dhabi	Red tides, illegal activities, stranded Marine and Terrestrial life.	800-555
Sea World	Marine strandings	056 503 0060
National Aquarium in Abu Dhabi	Stranded marine life (Sea Turtles, etc)	02 418 6666
The Dolphin Project Dr. Ada Natoli	The UAE Dolphin Project	056 671 7164
Emirates Nature WWF	General enquiries	098 532 3400



