

Turtles

The BIOT Marine Protected Area is home to two species of turtles, the critically endangered **hawksbill** (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) and endangered **green turtles** (*Chelonia mydas*) both of which depend on the undisturbed beaches and healthy marine ecosystems of BIOT for successful nesting and feeding. It is estimated that around 1000 adults of both species nest in BIOT every year.

Laying their eggs is a huge investment for female turtles. Over several hours they first heave themselves up to the top of the beach, dig a deep nest to prevent overheating of the eggs, or erosion by the tide and then slowly lay up to 150 eggs before covering and disguising their nest site. Female turtles are sometimes so exhausted and dehydrated by these efforts that they may get disorientated and struggle to return to the sea or may get stuck in vegetation. Bright lights are particularly confusing, as this may create a false horizon, so it is very important to maintain a good height of coastal vegetation around built-up areas to ensure a shielding effect. Sightings of turtles in difficulties should be reported to the Police Station, to ensure turtles are not unnecessarily disturbed.

The turtles nesting in BIOT may migrate a long distance from their nesting beaches. For example, BIOT's green turtles feed on the seagrass meadows in the northern part of the MPA, but they also forage more widely across the Indian Ocean. The scientists monitoring turtles in BIOT recently recorded the longest ever published migration for a post-nesting adult green turtle – a record-breaking 3,979 km² from BIOT to Somalia on the eastern coast of Africa.

BIOT also hosts very important habitats for juvenile hawksbill and green turtles. If you stand on the viewing platform overlooking the water at Turtle Cove, you are sure to see some cruising up the channel. These turtles can spend many years in the shallow and safe waters of BIOT, grazing on algae growing on rocks in Turtle Cove and Shark Cove. Other species such as **black-tip reef** and **lemon sharks** can also be spotted, patrolling the shore. Black-tip reef sharks prefer the shallow waters, where they can herd prey species such as mullet into a confined area, before striking. **Cowtail stingrays** (*Pastinachus sephen*) are also common, rooting for crustaceans, worms or shrimps in the silt.

We help prevent any disturbance to these animals by prohibiting any water activities in the Turtle Cove area.



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