

When Hatchlings Take Off!

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Originally published in *The School Magazine*, Countdown Issue 7, 2023

Learning resource – <https://www.theschoolmagazine.com.au/learning-resources/when-hatchlings-take-off>

Have you ever wanted to watch ancient creatures—who are older than dinosaurs—hatch into the world? How can that be? Well, read on to find out more!

Ah! You startled me!

They're fierce! They're strong! They're ... marine turtles! And they're older than dinosaurs! Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have used the symbol of the turtle for thousands of years as it represents patience, stability, wisdom, longevity and a strong connection to Earth.

There are seven species of marine turtles in the world. And three of these are known to nest their eggs along the 1.6 kilometre long sandy beach of Mon Repos, near Bundaberg on Queensland's central coast. These three species of marine turtles are the loggerhead, flatback and green. But it's the loggerhead turtles that are the most frequent visitors to Mon Repos beach, digging 95% of their nests along the coast. And one mama turtle can lay over 100 eggs! Now that's a lot of eggs!

Mon Repos is home to a conservation park that has the largest concentration of nesting marine turtles on the Eastern Australian mainland. And you know what that means ... baby turtle hatchlings are everywhere!

Turtally Awesome, Dude!

At the Mon Repos Conservation Park, rangers and researchers work along the beach, safely helping nesting turtles and emerging hatchlings. And you can join them too! Here's some important information for you to know if you're planning to become a Turtle Watcher:

Nesting turtles lay their eggs during the nesting season between late November to March.

Baby turtles hatch in early January all the way to late March.

As a Turtle Watcher, you'll learn that hatchlings usually leave their nests at night. They wait until the temperature drops at the surface of their nest before emerging. This tells them that it's nightfall.

Now, you need to know that when you're a Turtle Watcher you must be patient. The hatchlings will only emerge in the dark of the night and can take some time before they appear. In the nest, these little hatchlings use their carbuncle (temporary egg tooth) to help them break open their shell—this can take a couple of hours. In a fierce group, these hatchlings climb upwards through the sand that they're buried under. They breathe the air between the sand grains as they climb. Surprisingly, it takes them a couple of days to climb to the top, but when they do, it takes 5-10 minutes for them all to emerge onto the sand.

The rangers and researchers at Mon Repos will use their own special torchlights to show you the hatchlings as they appear and race down to the ocean. There will be an explosion of excitement for a couple of minutes. You'll witness a special and awe-inspiring moment in life: baby sea animals in their natural world—living, breathing, racing and ready for adventure! The hatchlings will use the natural light skyline and horizon to find their way to the ocean. This is why it's important to not use your own torchlight, and to listen to the rangers and researchers.

Sea you soon!

Sadly, marine turtles are endangered and listed as threatened wildlife. Only one in one thousand hatchlings will survive to reach adulthood and maturity to breed; this can take between 20 to 50 years. That means most will only reach the age of 30 years old! Human activity, pollution and changes to the environment are the greatest threats to their survival.

Marine turtles are extremely important because they help maintain the health and wellbeing of seagrass beds and coral reefs. These turtles are the vital link to marine ecosystems that work together to help shape a bubble of life in the ocean.

But if we try to keep marine turtles safe and respect them, they'll be able to flourish. This is why conservation parks, like the one at Mon Repos, are so important. It means that future generations, just like yours, can enjoy these spectacular moments of life, observing the wonders of the world and ancient creatures.

So next time you're in Queensland, you might want to visit Mon Repos Conservation Park and see some hatchlings take off!

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