



HICATEE FACTS

Central American River Turtle / *Dermatemys mawii* / Hicatee Turtle

1. **STATUS:** The Hicatee turtle is one of Belize's few critically endangered animals. This means that the turtle is facing a high risk of extinction in the wild.
2. **THREAT:** Overhunting for human consumption is the greatest threat.
3. **EVOLUTION:** The Hicatee is the lone surviving representative in a family of turtles dating back to the age of dinosaurs.
4. **RANGE:** Hicatees are found in southern Mexico, northern Guatemala, and Belize.
5. **HABITAT:** These fully aquatic turtles live in deep rivers, lagoons, and other freshwater bodies.
6. **DIET:** Hicatees are completely herbivorous (vegetarian) from hatchling to adulthood. They feed on shoreline and submerged vegetation including leaves, grasses, fruits, and flowers.
7. **RESPIRATION:** These turtles acquire oxygen from breathing through their nostrils and have a gill-like structure in their throat that allows them to absorb oxygen from the water.
8. **NESTING:** Nesting frequently occurs below the surface of the water in muddy banks.
9. **EGGS:** Eggs are laid in clutches of 8-14. Eggs undergo delayed development (called Embryonic Diapause) and can take up to 6 months to hatch.
10. **HATCHLINGS:** Hatchling turtles emerge from the egg by using a single sharp tooth to break through the shell. This action is called "pipping." The egg tooth drops off a few weeks to months after hatching.
11. **SEXUAL DIMORPHISM:** Males and females are sexually dimorphic meaning that the males look different than females. Adult males have bright yellow heads and significantly larger tails.
12. **TEMPERATURE REGULATION:** Unlike most reptiles, Hicatees do not bask in the sun to regulate their body temperature.
13. **LIFESPAN:** Records indicate up to 45 years, but likely they live much longer.
14. **RESEARCH:** The Hicatee Conservation and Research Center (HCRC) located in the Toledo District is the only captive breeding facility in the world that conducts research on this turtle's natural history and reproductive biology.

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE, TAKE THE HICATEE PLEDGE!

- **Hicatee turtles are not pets.** Hicatees depend on their natural habitats and food resources in freshwater rivers and lagoons in order to remain healthy.
- **Captive breeding should be left to the experts.** Hicatee turtles in captivity require specialized care, examinations and support. The captive breeding facility at the BFREE Field Station, Hicatee Conservation and Research Center (HCRC), is overseen by scientists, veterinarians and specialists who are working to understand the captive needs of this unique turtle.
- **All laws in Belize relating to the Hicatee should be followed.** More people should respect the wildlife laws. Regulations should be more strict to keep the hicatee from going extinct.
- **Hicatee turtles should be the national reptile of Belize.** Like Baird's tapir and the Keel-billed toucan, Hicatee turtles are culturally important. They should be celebrated and protected as our national reptile.

NATIONAL REPTILE OF BELIZE

Hicatee turtles are not only classified as critically endangered but they belong to the most endangered turtle family in the world!

A significant part of Belize's culture, history and tradition, this ancient turtle is on the brink of extinction unless we work together to save it. Raising its status to the national reptile is a way to honor this unique part of Belize's natural environment and culture.

CURRENT LAWS & REGULATIONS

- ILLEGAL to buy or sell Hicatee
- ILLEGAL to catch between 1 May and 31 May
- ILLEGAL to capture in several areas in Belize
- A person must have no more than 3 Hicatees on them at any time or transport more than five in any vehicle
- There are size limits: Any females caught must be between 15.2 to 17.2 inches in size
- No person shall possess or use a net to take Hicatee

We are actively working to create stricter laws to ensure the safety and longevity of Hicatee turtles.

To learn more about the laws, contact the Belize Fisheries Department. 224-4552

17 OCTOBER IS NATIONAL HICATEE DAY!

Join people from around the world every year on the 17th of October to celebrate the Hicatee Turtle! Do something good for the environment or tell a friend why the hicatee should be protected. Together, we can make a difference!



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