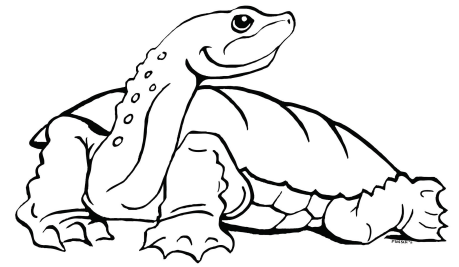


# HOPE FOR BELIZE'S HICATEE CENTRAL AMERICAN RIVER TURTLE



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

## HICATEE FACTS

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.