The Call of the Sea

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In the beginning . . .

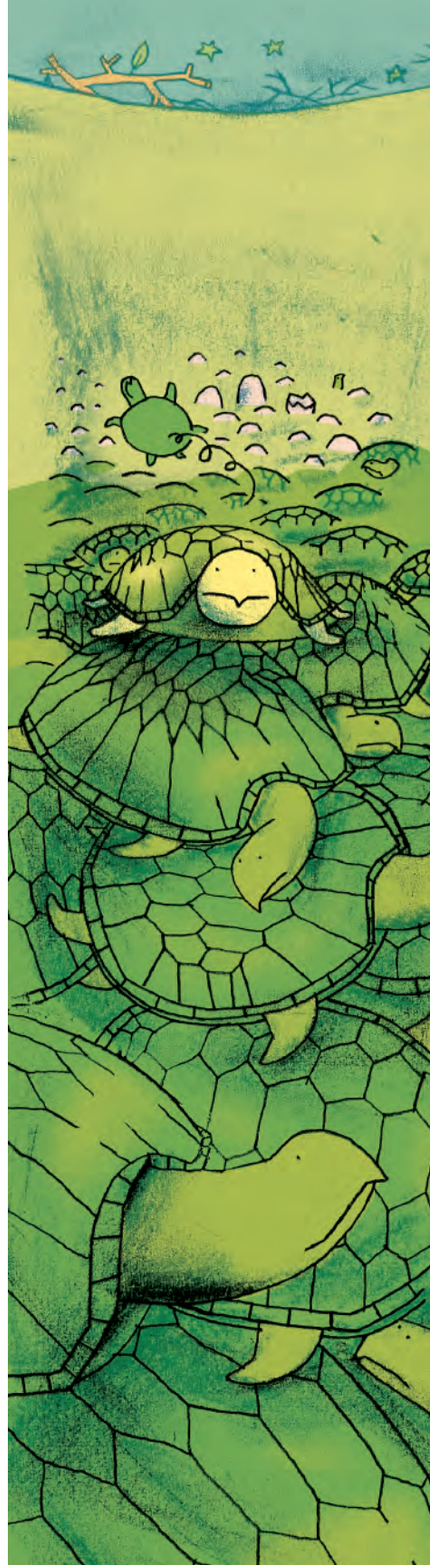
I open my eyes for the first time and there, far above me, is the black sky studded with stars. I need to move up toward the stars and out to the surf that I hear crashing in the distance. How do I know this? I'm not sure exactly . . . It's as if all the experience of earlier generations of turtles is packed inside my head, like air in a balloon. The balloon pops, and thousands of tiny nuggets of knowledge shower my brain.

I guess this is what is called "instinct."

All around me, other eggs are hatching. Shells crack and split, revealing the tooth-like horn at the tip of each baby's snout. My nest-mates and I climb on top of one another. There are dozens and dozens of us and we all have the same goal: survival.

I am a sea turtle; a hawksbill turtle, to be precise. I have just been born this very moment.

I will never know my mother. She laid her eggs on this beach last spring, and it is now early autumn. She dug a deep hole in the sand in which to lay over 100 eggs, then camouflaged the nest well, using twigs, branches, and sand. This helped to hide the eggs from the badgers, foxes, and weasels that might have eaten all the eggs before they were hatched.



Cold-blooded Animals

Unlike mammals and birds, amphibians and reptiles are cold-blooded animals. They regulate their temperature by taking advantage of their environment.

1 *At night, the desert is frigid. The lizard buries itself in a lair that is 60° F. Its body temperature is 62.5° F.*

2 *In the early morning, the temperature is cool. The lizard warms itself in the sun on a rock. Its temperature can rise to 86° F in less than half an hour.*

3 *At mid-morning, the sun shines brightly. The lizard's dark skin absorbs the solar heat. Its temperature stabilizes at 95° F. It hunts insects and flees from predators.*

4 *At noon, the temperature nears 120° F. The lizard stays in the shade.*

5 *In the afternoon, when the temperature drops, it "lounges" in the sun or on warm rocks to maintain its 95° F body heat. It digests during this time.*

6 *When the sun goes down, the lizard returns to its lair.*

A day in the life of a lizard

A lizard seeks the right temperature by changing place and posture. It warms up by exposing itself to the sun to gather energy so it can hunt. But it is quick to seek shade when the temperature gets too high: this keeps its body from overheating.

The squirming lizard

To walk on burning hot sand, the lizard does acrobatics. It lifts up its left front and right rear feet at the same time, allowing them to cool off. Then it walks a little more and pauses again to cool the other two feet.

Controlling its temperature

An iguana's skin changes color according to the temperature. In the early morning and late afternoon its skin is dark, to absorb the heat. In the hotter times of day, its skin is light, reflecting the sun's rays.

Recharging its batteries

To be active, reptiles must have energy. One way to get energy is to warm themselves by basking in the sun.