

Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle



Kemp's Ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*) Photo: NOAA



Female Kemp's Ridley on Alabama's Gulf Coast
Photo: Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge



Photo: Kim Bassos-Hull,
Mote Marine Laboratory

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Facts

***The Kemp's Ridley sea turtle is the smallest**, adults rarely exceed 30 inches in length and 75-100 lbs. **They are the only daytime nesting species** and are primarily carnivorous throughout life. Although they feed mainly on crabs, **these turtles eat jellyfish, snails, clams, squid eggs, shrimp, insects, barnacles, sea urchins, sea cucumbers, fishes, and diamondback terrapins (small aquatic turtles).**

*They are found in the coastal waters and bays of the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Ocean where they forage. Although mostly confined to the Gulf of Mexico, females still may **migrate long distances, often more than 600 miles** to and from the only significant nesting beach, at Rancho Nuevo, Tamaulipas, Mexico. In recent years, a Kemp's Ridley nest has been found in Alabama each season.

*Groups of females move onto the beach to lay their eggs over a period of a few days. Nest construction is similar to that by other sea turtles, but the Kemp's Ridley nests are generally shallower. Females produce up to four nests, "clutches", usually one to three, per season at intervals of 10–49 days. Clutch size ranges from 51 to 185 eggs, nests of 100–110 eggs being most common. In 50-55 days, the eggs hatch and the baby turtles (hatchlings) rush to the water and out to sea. After at least 10 years at sea, adult females return to nest at the same beach where they hatched. Male turtles never leave the water. They appear in waters near the nesting beach during the breeding season to mate with the females.

*The nesting population produced a low of 702 nests in 1985; however, since the mid-1980's, the number of nests laid in a season has been increasing primarily due to nest protection efforts and implementation of regulations requiring the use of turtle excluder devices (TED's) in commercial fishing trawls. **Sea turtles breathe at the surface, so if they get entangled in the net and cannot escape, they drown.**

***Major threats** to sea turtles in the U.S. include, but are not limited to: **destruction and alteration of nesting and foraging habitats; getting struck by vessels; and entanglement in marine debris.** Every year, marine debris injures and kills marine life, interferes with navigation safety, has adverse economic impacts to shipping and coastal industries, and poses a threat to human health. **Our oceans and waterways are constantly polluted with a wide variety of marine debris ranging from soda cans and plastic bags to derelict fishing gear and abandoned vessels.**

***How you can help keep our environment healthy ***

Take a garbage bag and pick up litter you find in gutters, on sidewalks or at the beach

Don't improperly dispose of fishing lines, nets or any plastic or other litter in or near the water, or anywhere. Remember that storm drains in the streets also lead to our rivers and oceans

Reduce the amount of disposable products you buy—Reuse, Recycle and Compost

Use environmentally safe cleaning and gardening products. What we put into our water will come back to us



Some of the material in this publication was adapted from original work by the Texas Fish & Wildlife Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

