

Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtles

What about these Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtles?

- Kemp's Ridley sea turtles have been endangered since 1970.
- Their scientific name is *Lepidochelys kempi*.
- Weighing only 75-100 pounds, they are the smallest sea turtle.
- Hatchlings and juveniles are gray black.
- Adult turtles are gray green or olive green.
- They prefer to eat crabs, but their diet also includes dead shrimp, fish, clams, and sea urchins.
- They live in lagoons, bays and shallow coastal areas in the Gulf of Mexico.
- They nest in the Gulf of Mexico, near Rancho Nuevo in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas.



How do Kemp's Ridley Turtles nest?

- Adults as young as 10 years old return to the beach where they were born to nest
- Females nest 2-3 times per season.
- The nesting season runs from the middle of April to July or August.
- Kemp's Ridley turtles are the only turtles which nest in the daytime.
- Females dig nest with their hind flippers.
- Each nest usually contains 100 eggs.
- Eggs have a leathery shell and are the size of ping pong balls.
- After a 40-60 day incubation period hatchlings emerge from the nests.
- Hatchlings come out at night and rush toward the surf.



Why are the turtles endangered?

- Too many turtles and turtle eggs were harvested.
- Nests are raided by predators such as havalenas, quanimenga, skunk, coyotes, dogs, and raccoons.
- Not all hatchlings survive to adulthood because they are eaten by ghost crabs, large fish, sharks, and seagulls.
- Adult turtles get caught in fishing nets, crab traps, longlines, and hook and line.
- Turtles become entangled in or ingest debris in the water such as plastic, rubber, tar, cellophane, wax, Styrofoam, rope and string, aluminum cans, charcoal, cigarettes, etc.



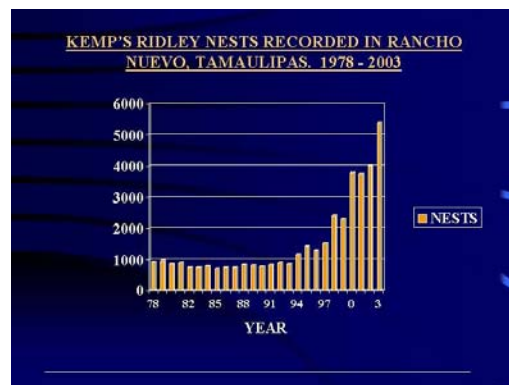
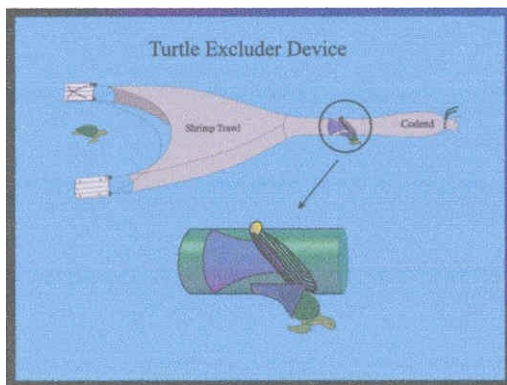
What is being done to help the turtles?

- Turtle restoration camps have been set up to protect the nests.
- People are patrolling beaches in search of nests.
- Nests are collected and eggs are relocated to corrals.
- Eggs are replanted into corrals that protect against predators.
- Nests are covered with mosquito netting to protect against parasitic fly larvae infestation.
- When hatched, hatchlings are counted and released at night.
- Over 400,000 hatchlings were released from turtle camps in 2002.



Other interesting facts about the turtles

- “tortuga lora” is the Spanish name for the Kemp’s Ridley turtles
- “arribadas” or “arribazones” mean “great arrival” and refer to mass nestings, with more than 60 turtles nesting at once.
- All shrimp vessels fishing in areas where turtles are found TEDs (turtle excluder devices). A TED is a door placed in a trawl net that allows turtles to escape.
- The Kemp’s Ridley turtles are named for Richard Kemp, a fisherman who found the species in Florida in 1906.
- The number of nests, eggs and hatchlings are increasing.
- If this recovery can be continued, the Kemp’s ridley turtle may be removed from the endangered species list in the next five years.



What can I do to help the turtles?

- Release a sea turtle hatchling in your name or the name of your family or friend!
- Each \$10 (tax-deductible) donation helps support the turtle restoration program and releases a hatchling in the name you choose.
- Send turtle names and donation to: Release A Hatchling, 11921 Freedom Drive, Suite 550-PMB 5582, Reston, VA 20190 or online at www.releaseahatchling.org.



Sponsored by Ocean Trust, a 501(c)(3) national marine conservation foundation. Visit us at www.oceantrust.org. Photo credits: Ocean Trust, Gladys Porter Zoo, Scott Wellsandt.