



REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

KEMP'S RIDLEY SEA TURTLE

ABOUT

The Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle, also known as Atlantic Ridley Sea Turtle, (*Lepidochelys Kempii*) is the smallest species of sea turtle. It is 20-28 inches (51-71 cm) long, and weighs between 80 and 110 pounds (35-50kg). This turtle is one of seven types of sea turtle that inhabit U.S. waters. Its carapace (top shell) is almost circular and grayish green in color, while the plastron (bottom shell) is pale yellowish to cream. Each of the front flippers has one claw, but on the back flippers, there may be two. Kemp's Ridley turtles have a distinct and unique nesting habit. Large groups of female turtles gather off specific nesting beaches in the state of Tamaulipas, Mexico, although a few have been recorded nesting in small numbers in parts of the U.S. Wave upon wave of females come ashore and nest in what is called an "arribada" – meaning "arrival" in Spanish. Female Kemp's Ridleys nest from May to July, and lay two to three clutches of approximately 100 eggs. These eggs incubate for 50-60 days and when the hatchlings emerge they weigh about half an ounce (14 grams) and only measure 1.5 inches (3.8 cm). They are the only sea turtle species that nests predominantly during the daytime.

DID YOU KNOW?

Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle is named after Richard M. Kemp, a fisherman from Florida, who first submitted the species for identification in 1906. They prefer habitats that contain muddy or sandy bottoms where their food source of swimming crabs, fish, jellyfish, and a variety of mollusks can be found. Kemp's Ridleys are found throughout the Gulf of Mexico and U.S. Atlantic seaboard, from Florida to New England. This endangered sea turtle faces threats on its nesting beaches and in its marine environment. The greatest cause of decline and primary threat is their incidental capture in fishing nets – usually those of shrimp trawlers. Egg collection by humans was an extreme threat to the population, but since nesting beaches were given official protection in 1966, the situation has improved. In 2006, a record number of nests were recorded since monitoring began in 1978 – 7,866 out of 12,143 of them at Rancho Nuevo, Mexico.

For more detailed information visit: www.nmfs.noaa.gov or www.dec.state.ny.us.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Which year were the nesting beaches of Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle given official protection?

- a) 1906
- b) 1978
- c) 1966
- d) 2006

Answer is C.

