

SEA TURTLE FACT SHEET

KEMP'S RIDLEY (*Lepidochelys kempii*)

☉ Sea turtles are ancient reptiles that have lived on the Earth for **150 million years**, since before the time of the dinosaurs.

☉ Of the seven species of sea turtles, the Kemp's Ridleys are the most endangered. They were listed on December 2, 1970, under the Endangered Species Act. There are only 1,500 to 2,000 nesting females left in the world today. However, just 50 years ago, 40,000 females were filmed nesting in just one day. All of these females nest in the Gulf of Mexico.

☉ Adults' **average weight** is 90 pounds (41 kg) with a carapace (top shell) length of 2 feet (61cm.). Its shell color ranges from an olive to gray-green, and it is oval or heart shaped. The Kemp's ridley is the smallest of all the sea turtle species.

☉ Kemp's ridleys live in shallow coastal areas, bays, and lagoons. While they are primarily located in the Gulf of Mexico, Kemp's ridleys migrate up and down the Atlantic Coast.

☉ The **food** of the adult Kemp's ridley includes crabs, shrimp, and fish.

☉ Kemp's ridleys take from 11 to 35 years to reach reproductive maturity.

☉ Not only is the Kemp's ridley the most endangered sea turtle, but with only about 3,000 adults

alive today, it is one of the 12 most endangered animals in the world.

☉ Kemp's ridleys and olive ridleys are the two sea turtle species who share a phenomenal nesting behavior known as the arribada (which means "arrival" in Spanish). Breeding female turtles congregate in the waters in front of the beach and on some as yet unknown cue (possibly the release of pheromones) emerge from the sea all at once.

☉ The Kemp's ridley is the only sea turtle that **nests during the day**.

☉ Historically, as many as 1,000,000 females would nest in one arribada, which could have continued for several days. Nesting season usually occurs from April to July along the Gulf of Mexico, their main habitat.

☉ Today, the only significant nesting sites of the Kemp's ridley are at Rancho Nuevo and Veracruz, Mexico. A tiny number of females nest at Padre Island National Seashore, on the Texas coast.

☉ Kemp's ridleys lay about 100 eggs in each nest. Hatchling incubation takes from 48 to 62 days depending on the temperature of the sand. The average hatchling is 1 3/4 inches (4.5 cm.) in length, weighs .6 oz. (17 grams), and has a gray-black color. Eggs are ping-pong ball shaped and sized, and have a soft leather-like shell, that hardens as the hatchling turtle inside it matures.

☉ What has brought the Kemp's ridley sea turtle and other sea turtle species to the edge of **extinction** is:

- the commercial exploitation of sea turtle eggs
- the drownings of sea turtles in shrimp nets
- general pollution of the oceans
- the large scale poaching of adult turtles for meat and leather
- development and destruction of nesting beaches

