

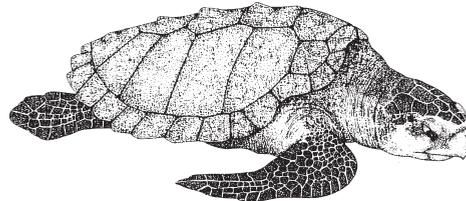


## Sea Turtles of Texas

Five of the world's seven sea turtle species are found in Texas: leatherback, hawksbill, green, loggerhead, and Kemp's ridley. All five species have been documented nesting on Padre Island National Seashore, but the vast majority of nesting records are of the Kemp's ridley. These magnificent marine animals, once abundant in the oceans, have declined during the last century. Harvesting of eggs, slaughtering for food and consumer products, incidental capturing by the fishing industry, and other factors are to blame for dwindling sea turtle populations. Each of the five sea turtle species is now classified as either threatened or endangered, and could become extinct unless steps are taken to protect and enhance their populations.

For over three decades, the National Seashore has worked to protect sea turtles here. From April through mid-July, National Park Service volunteers and staff search the beaches of Padre Island from 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. daily. These patrols occur during the day since Kemp's ridleys nest primarily during the daytime, in contrast to the other species which nest at night. The goal of this program is to better detect and protect nesting sea turtles, eggs, and hatchlings. Increasing their odds of survival on land may compensate for human caused losses elsewhere.

### Kemp's Ridley



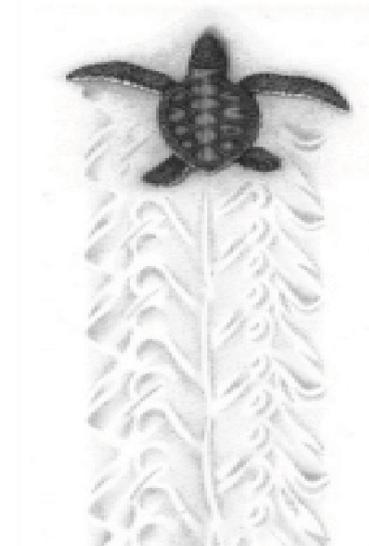
The Kemp's ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*) is the most endangered species of sea turtle. Its principle nesting area is a 16-mile stretch of beach at Playa de Rancho Nuevo, Tamaulipas, Mexico, where approximately 40,000 Kemp's ridleys nested in a single day in 1947. The Kemp's ridley population dwindled to a low of only 702 nests in 1985. Numbers have since increased in Mexico, but are still far less than formerly recorded.

### International Efforts to Save the Kemp's Ridley

To save the Kemp's ridley, the United States federal government, the state of Texas, and the Republic of Mexico joined forces in an attempt to re-establish a nesting population at Padre Island National Seashore. The program is designed around the theory that mature sea turtles return to the beach where they hatched to lay their own eggs. From 1978 to 1988 a total of 22,507 eggs were collected at Rancho Nuevo, Mexico and

placed in styrofoam boxes containing Padre Island sand. The eggs were then transported to a laboratory at Padre Island National Seashore and incubated.

After hatching, the young turtles were released on the beach and allowed to crawl to the surf, hopefully leaving them with a lasting impression of the beach. Following a short swim in the Gulf of Mexico, the baby turtles were recaptured and transported to the National Marine Fisheries Service Laboratory in Galveston, Texas. The turtles were raised for one year in Galveston, growing large enough to avoid most predators and also to be tagged for future recognition.



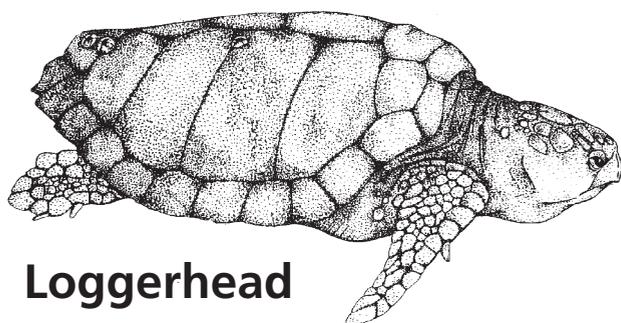
## Nesting Increasing

After years of arduous effort, a nesting population is being re-established at Padre Island National Seashore. The first two recorded returnees from the 1978-1988 project to re-establish a nesting colony were documented nesting here in 1996. Today, more Kemp's ridley nests are found at Padre Island National Seashore than any other location in the United States. Although some of these turtles are from the 1978-1988 project, most are turtles that are naturally repopulating the area.

## How Can You Help?

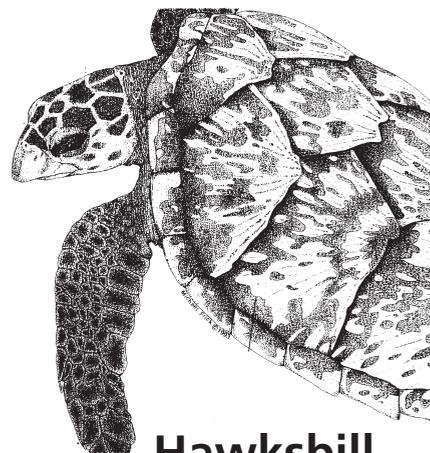
Be observant. If you see any live or dead sea turtles on the beach, immediately contact a park ranger or call the park sea turtle biologist at (361) 949-8173, extension 226. However, do not detain nesting turtles or hatchlings emerging from a previously undetected nest. Taking or having in your possession any part of these threatened or endangered turtles is a felony with fines ranging up to \$20,000. If you find a nesting female, do not approach her until she has already begun laying her eggs or is covering her nest.

Look at her front flippers to find a metal tag and record the number, but do not remove the tag. If possible, photograph or videotape the nesting turtle or emerging hatchlings and protect them from passing traffic. Place a distinguishable marker in the sand about one foot to the side of the nest. Also protect any sea turtle tracks you find. Place a noticeable object next to the tracks and note their exact location. Be sure to notice how far the tracks extend up the beach. Any information reported to park rangers will help to save these docile creatures.

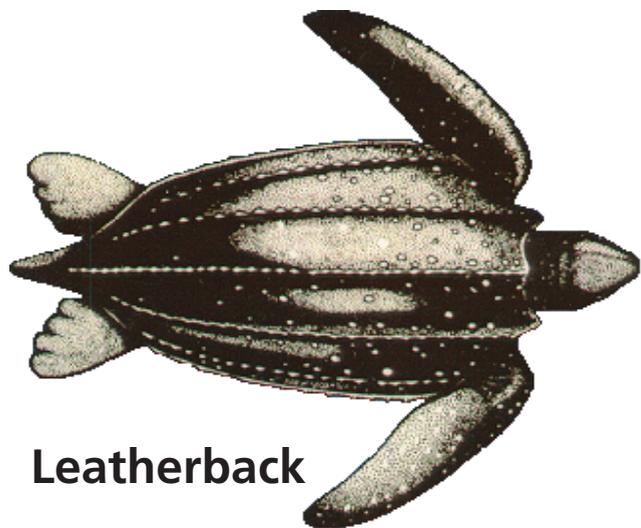


**Loggerhead**

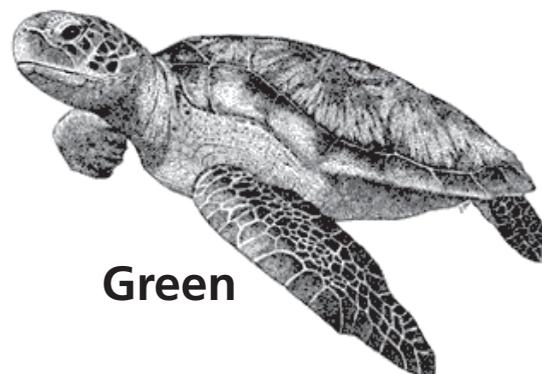
### Other Threatened or Endangered Sea Turtles That Nest at the National Seashore



**Hawksbill**



**Leatherback**



**Green**

During sea turtle nesting and hatching season, information on hatchling releases can be obtained by calling (361) 949-7163 or visiting our website at [www.nps.gov/pais](http://www.nps.gov/pais).