

# Kemp's Ridley Turtle

## *Lepidochelys kempii*

### Physical Characteristics and Adaptations

- Weight: 100 lbs. (45 kg).
- Length: 22 to 30 inches (55-75 cm).
- Coloration: gray/green. Plastron (bottom shell) is pale yellow in color.
- Shell may be as wide as it is long. Carapace (top shell) contains 5 pairs of scutes (scale-like plates made of keratin).
- Each front flipper has one claw; back flippers may have one or two claws. These large flippers cannot be withdrawn into shell.
- Senses: excellent sense of smell; underwater vision is good but sea turtles are near-sighted on land.
- Salt gland continuously excretes thick, clear mucous that lubricates the eyes and eliminates excess salt.

### Range/Habitat

- Found in the Western Atlantic along the eastern coast of the United States and the Gulf of Mexico.
- Found in coastal areas near muddy or sandy bottoms. In the open ocean, this turtle can dive to great depths.
- Juveniles are found further in open waters among sargassum seaweed.

### Diet/Feeding

- Diet consists mainly of crabs, but may also include mollusks (snails and bivalves), fish, and jellyfish. May also eat some vegetation.
- Feeds by using thick jaws to crush prey.

### Reproduction

- Breeding occurs in the water, after which time the female will return to the beach where she was hatched to lay her eggs and then return to the sea.
- Large groups of females come ashore at the same time to lay eggs in what's called an "arribada," which is Spanish for "arrival."
- The Kemp's ridley is the only sea turtle species that nests mainly during daylight hours.
- Eggs will typically incubate for 60 days before hatching.
- Nest temperature determines the gender of hatchlings. Cooler temperatures typically produce more males; warmer temperatures typically produce more females.
- Males and females take 11-35 years to reach maturity.

### Conservation Status

- "Critically Endangered" on the IUCN Red List.
- Dramatic decline in nesting population since the mid-1900s.
- The greatest threat to the Kemp's ridley is hunting for turtle meat and turtle eggs, as well as bycatch in shrimp nets.

**What can YOU do?** By keeping our oceans clean, reducing your use of plastics, and supporting sustainable fisheries, you are helping to ensure a healthy future for the Kemp's ridley.