

Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle

Lepidochelys kempii



www.euroturtle.org

Picture

English - Kemp's Ridley turtle;

French - Tortue de Kemp;

Spanish - Tortuga lora



Size and Body Mass

Overall body mass in Kg:

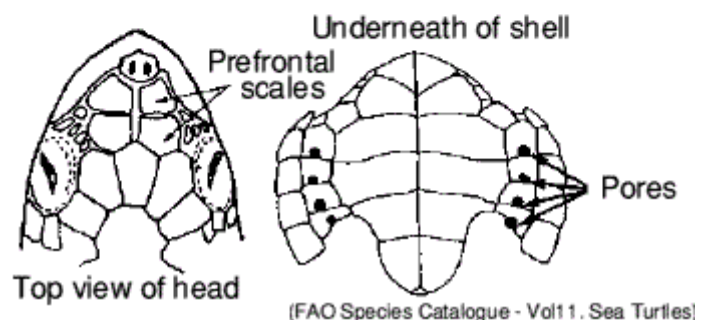
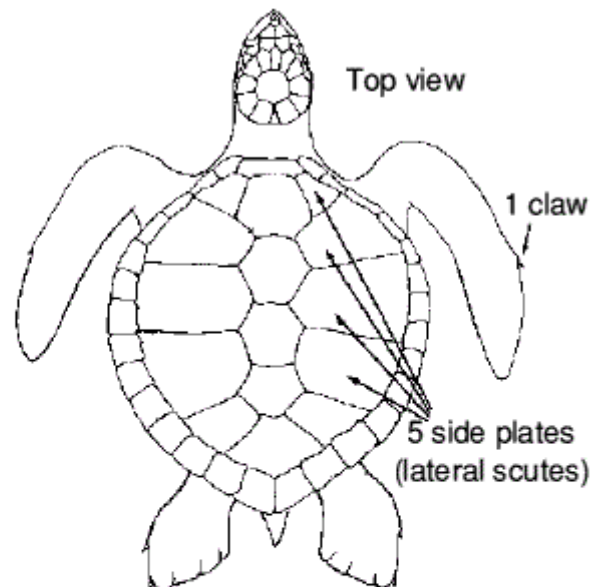
- With Olive Ridelys the smallest species.
- Carapace length SCL mean : 65.7 cm; range 52.4 to 74.8 cm
- Body mass (females mean) 38.2 kg; range 32 to 48 kg

Diagnostic Features

- Carapace is nearly round
- Rathkes gland open on 4th infra marginal scales
- Flippers: fore usually only one claw in adults: hind 1 or 2 claws
- Colour: dorsal - olive grey; ventral - white or yellowish

Geographical Distribution

- Range limited to the coastal waters of Western, Northern and North Eastern Australia.
- Indigenous to Australia.



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Habitat and Biology



illustration: M. Demma © ICRAM

Typical habitats:

- No data

Migrations:

- Congregate to breed April to July before migrating either Northward to Mississippi area or Southwards to the Campeche Bank.
- Some continue on up the Eastern coast. They keep close to the coast.
- It seems likely that the turtles turn back towards the nesting areas when they reach juvenile size.

Nesting areas:

- Gulf of Mexico: usually inhabits sandy and muddy bottoms.
- Juveniles frequently found in bays, coastal lagoons and river mouths.

Nesting periods:

- April to late July.
- Mass nesting ('arribadas'), as huge numbers gather at daytime on windy days.



illustration: M. Demma © ICRAM

Nesting behaviour:

- 58% of females nest every year.
- Average number of layings per female is 1.5 per season.
- Most of the population nests on one beach 40 km long.

Egg number, size and weight:

- Mean number - 102
- Egg Size: 34 - 45mm; mass: 24 - 40g



illustration: M. Demma © ICRAM

Size and weight of hatchlings:

- 17.2 g with carapace length of 43.9 mm.

Incubation time:

- 45 - 58 days

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illustration: M. Demma © ICRAM

Maturity:

- 10 to 12 years (5 years in captivity)



illustration: M. Demma
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Courtship and Mating:

- No data.

Sex determination:

- No data.

Hatching:

- No data.

Hatchling mortality and predation:

- Eggs eaten by coyotes, skunks, coates, ghost crabs.
- Hatchings killed by same predators plus birds, and at sea by larger fish eg. barracudas.

Commensals and disease:

- Epibionts are rare - some barnacles.
- Fibropapillomae have been detected but only a few times per year during 23 years of a study (1989)

Feeding:



Molluscs



Crustaceans



Jellyfish



Urchins



Fish

Illustrations (except far right): M. Demma © ICRAM

- Carnivorous: eating crustaceans associated with sandy and muddy seabeds form largest part of stomach content.
- Also molluscs, sea urchins, jellyfish and fish.

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Threats to Survival



Loss of habitat due to coastal development, including tourism and industrialisation



Accidental capture by fishing activities (e.g. trawling)



Pollution due to industrial waste, marine debris, tar etc.



Human predation due to meat consumption



Animal predation

Illustrations: M. Demma © ICRAM

- Fully protected since 1966 when included in the Red Data book and considered endangered in Appendix I of CITES
- In spite of the increasing numbers of hatchlings being released, the species is still in decline.
- In the 1940s, 40,000 nested per day, in 1989 less than 700 per season.
- Large numbers are still caught accidentally by fishermen, particularly in shrimp nets.