

# Rare Animals of Louisiana



## Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle *Lepidochelys kempii*

Rarity Rank: SNA/G1

	1	2	3	4	5
State					
Global					
	imperiled		rare		secure



### Identification:

- This is only sea turtle with an almost circular carapace.
- The carapace varies in color and may be dark grey, brown, black, or olive.
- Distinguishing features are 2 pairs of prefrontal scales; 5 or more costal scutes, with the first pair touching the nuchal; and 4 (rarely 5) large scutes on the bridge, each with a pore on the posterior edge.
- Ridleys are the smallest sea turtles, weighing 36-45 kg (80-100 lb) with a carapace 50-70 cm (20-28 in) in length; large individuals may have a shell up to 75 cm (30 in) in length.
- Kemp's ridleys prefer sheltered areas along the coast, such as bays, bayous, and estuaries, during the non-nesting period.
- Although this species does not nest in Louisiana, the estuarine and off-shore waters of Louisiana may afford key feeding and developmental sites.
- In addition, some of the deepwater channels and estuaries in Louisiana may provide important hibernation sites.

**Habitat:** Warm bays and coastal waters; tidal rivers; estuaries; sea grass beds; sandy coastal beaches are used for nesting.

### Food Habits:

- They are apparently mostly bottom feeders.
- Kemp's ridleys eat a variety of aquatic animals such as crustaceans, mollusks, fish, jellyfish, squid, and starfish.

**Reproduction:** Females lay several hundred eggs during the nesting season and may nest every year, unlike other sea turtles.

### Threats:

- Intense exploitation of Kemp's ridley eggs was undoubtedly the most important cause of the decline.
- Of secondary importance is harvest of adults for food and incidental catch in fishing gear.

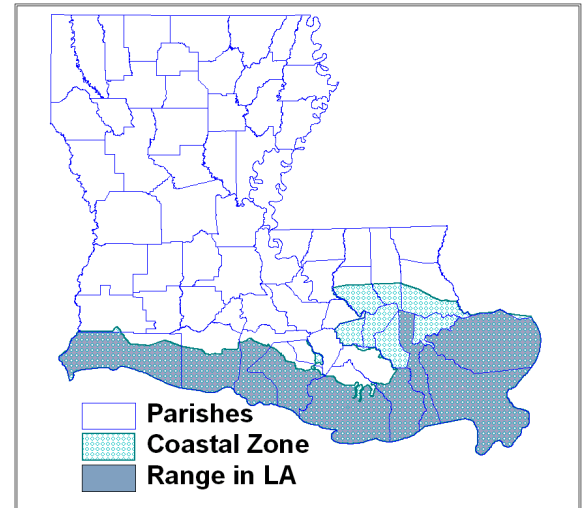
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## ***Beneficial Management Practices:***

- Utilize “Turtle Excluding Devices” on shrimp trawls.
- Restrict beachfront lighting in nesting areas
- Coordinate beach nourishment and construction so as not to interfere with nesting
- Prevent nest and hatchling predation.
- Prevent harvest or harassment of adult turtles

***U. S. Range:*** AL, CT, DE, FL, GA, LA, MA, MD, ME, MS, NC, NH, NJ, NY, RI, TX, VA



*Range based on occurrences in Natural Heritage database*

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For more information, please visit our Web pages at

[www.wlf.louisiana.gov/wildlife/louisiana-natural-heritage-program](http://www.wlf.louisiana.gov/wildlife/louisiana-natural-heritage-program) or 225-765-2811

[www.BTNEP.org](http://www.BTNEP.org) or 1-800-259-0869