



News Release

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Report Sea Turtles Nesting: 1-866-TURTLE 5 (1-866-887-8535)

Sea Turtle Nesting Season Begins Again on the Texas Coast Public Asked to be Observant

Sea turtle nesting season is expected to begin a little earlier than usual this year, in early April, due to the warm spring we have been experiencing. The number of Kemp's ridley sea turtle nests found in Texas rose from 141 in 2010, to 199 in 2011, but they still have a long way to go before biologists are comfortable with saying that the most endangered sea turtle species in the world is steadily increasing toward recovery. Biologists want to stress the importance of locating and protecting every sea turtle nest on the Texas Gulf Coast.

"It will be through the public private partnership that these impressive turtles will be saved," said Benjamin Tuggle, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Southwest Regional Director. "The skilled array of partners working to preserve the Kemp's ridley in Texas, along with the assistance of the public, has been making the difference in growing this population in the U.S."

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), the National Park Service, NOAA Fisheries, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Sea Turtle, Inc., University of Texas at Austin's Marine Science Institute in Port Aransas - Animal Rehabilitation Keep (ARK), Texas A&M University at Galveston, and Sea Turtle Restoration Project work together to coordinate the response when a nesting sea turtle or sea turtle nest is found.

Beach goers play an important role in the detection of Kemp's ridley sea turtle nests, with many of the nests being found and reported by the public. Visitors to Texas beaches from April through August are urged to watch for nesting adult sea turtles and emerging hatchlings and report them immediately by calling 1-866-TURTLE5 (1-866-887-8535).

Efforts will be on-going during nesting season to find and protect the nesting turtles and their eggs, to ensure their survival and continued population growth. Biologists and volunteers will be patrolling Texas Gulf beaches daily from April through July. Patrols will be held during the day since these two-foot-long turtles come ashore for nesting mostly during daylight hours. Other species of turtles occasionally nest at night along the Texas coast.

If a nesting mother is seen, the Service advises visitors to quickly report the event. Visitors must keep their distance and not disturb her. The female turtle will dig a nest in the sand and lay her eggs.

After the turtle is finished laying her eggs, those in the vicinity must allow her to enter the surf. If possible the person(s) observing and reporting this activity should remain at the site until a biologist arrives. If that is not possible, nesting sites should be marked by carefully laying pieces of beach debris, such as pieces of wood or seaweed, in a large circle around the nest area, not on top, so biologists will be able to find the nest when they arrive. The nesting sites should never be walked on or disturbed.

In order to further protect the species, the public is asked to drive slowly and carefully on beaches during the nesting and hatching seasons and watch for “turtle crossings” so that vehicles do not inadvertently collide with nesting turtles or emerging hatchlings, or roll over a nest. The maximum speed on a Texas beach per the Texas Transportation Code is 15 mph. Those visiting the beaches should be prepared for short delays in order to ensure that nesting turtles and hatchlings remain safe and undisturbed.

In 1947, an estimated 40,000 Kemp’s ridley turtles nested on one stretch of beach near Rancho Nuevo, Mexico, the primary nesting beach for this species. Over the next four decades the species suffered a devastating decline. The nesting population produced a low of 702 nests in 1985 making it the most endangered species of sea turtle in the world. In response to the dramatic loss of this species, the Service and its partner agencies launched a cooperative international project aimed at nest protection efforts in the U.S. and Mexico, implementing regulations requiring the use of turtle excluder devices on commercial fishing trawlers, and forming a second nesting colony of Kemp’s ridley sea turtles at Padre Island National Seashore, Texas. These cooperative efforts are now paying off for the Kemp’s ridley sea turtle.

Anyone who takes (to kill, harm, harass, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, trap, capture, or collect, or attempt to engage in any such conduct), or has in their possession any part of these endangered turtles, could be found guilty of a Class A misdemeanor, with penalties of up to one year in jail and \$100,000 fine for an individual, and \$200,000 for an organization.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov. Connect with our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/usfws, follow our tweets at www.twitter.com/usfwshq, watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>.

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