



News Release

Public Affairs Office
PO Box 1306
Albuquerque, NM 87103
505/248-6911
505/248-6915 (Fax)

Southwest Region (Arizona • New Mexico • Oklahoma • Texas) www.fws.gov/southwest/

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Contacts: Tom Shearer CCESFO, 361-994-9005 x242
Kelsey Gocke CLESFO, 281-286-8282 x224
Dr. Donna Shaver, Padre Island National Seashore, 361-949-9173 x226
Report Sea Turtles Nesting: 866-TURTLE5 (866-887-8535)

Record Number of Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle Nests for a Single Day Found on Padre Island National Seashore

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the National Park Service (NPS) are pleased to announce that on May 18 of this year 34 Kemp's ridley sea turtles nests were located on the Texas coast. Of the 34 nests detected, 29 Kemp's ridley nests were found on the Padre Island National Seashore. This is the largest number of Kemp's ridley nests recorded at any U.S. beach on a single day since record keeping began in the early 1980s. In fact, it nearly doubles the previous single day record of 15 nests found at Padre Island National Seashore on May 19, 2010.

Kemp's ridley is the most endangered sea turtle species in the world. They often nest in synchronous emergences, or mass nesting events called *arribadas*, which may help the sea turtles to avoid depredation. The sea turtle eggs are now being incubated, and the hatchlings from this *arribada* will be released between July 3 and July 9.

"The Kemp's ridley nesting success is largely due to the decades of work by the NPS Division of Sea Turtle Science and Recovery at the Padre Island National Seashore, FWS biologists, and the many groups and volunteers who are our partners in sea turtle recovery," said Benjamin N. Tuggle, Ph.D., the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Southwest Regional Director. "This is the kind of cooperative effort that will eventually lead to success in saving these sea turtles as well as other imperiled species."

So far this nesting season, 173 Kemp's ridley sea turtle nests have been found on the Texas coast, and nesting could continue to mid-July. Of those 173, 103 nests have been found on the shores of the Padre Island National Seashore. While this is an increase in the number of nests from 2010, there were 197 Kemp's ridley nests detected in Texas during 2009.

"The latest mass nesting of Kemp's ridley sea turtles at Padre Island National Seashore furthers the remarkable success of the recovery program at the park. The dedication of the staff there and of all the stakeholders in this project cannot be overstated," said John Wessels, National Park Service Intermountain Region Director.

The NPS and FWS lead and coordinate sea turtle nest detection efforts in Texas. Detection and protection programs along the coast in Texas also involve Sea Turtle, Inc., Texas A&M University at Galveston, ARK rehabilitation facility, Sea Turtle Restoration Project, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, City of Corpus Christi, Texas Master Naturalists, and others. They systematically search the Gulf of Mexico beachfront to find, document, and protect nesting females and their eggs. At the Padre Island National Seashore, intensive nest detection efforts are conducted from April through mid-July each year. Eggs from most of these nests are incubated at Padre Island National Seashore Incubation Facility.

The public is invited to attend the releases of hatchlings from Kemp's ridley nests at the National Seashore, which is located on North Padre Island. Thousands of people come each year to view these releases which have already begun this year, and are likely to continue through early August.

The turtles reach sexual maturity at 10-15 years of age, and live exclusively in the ocean, only coming to shore to dig a nest and lay their eggs. They will then cover the nests with beach sand and return to the sea. The nesting sea turtle may return to the beach where she was hatched, or may lay her eggs hundreds of miles away. Scientists are unsure of their lifespan in the wild.

For more than 30 years NPS and FWS have participated in a multi-agency, bi-national project to increase Kemp's ridley nesting at Padre Island National Seashore. The goal has been to form a secondary nesting colony at the National Seashore as a safeguard against extinction for this species, which nests primarily at and near Rancho Nuevo, Mexico. More than half of the Kemp's ridley nests recorded in the U.S. each year are located at the National Seashore.

For the latest nest tally and more information about hatchling releases, visit the Padre Island National Seashore website at www.nps.gov/pais. Updates about nesting and hatchling releases are also posted on the Facebook page entitled Padre Island NS Division of Sea Turtle Science and Recovery.

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. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works cooperatively with the American public to continue the conservation legacy of America's great outdoors. 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>.