

# Sea Turtle Handling/Release Guidelines:

## Quick Reference for

### Atlantic Shark GILLNET Gear

October 2006

#### Guidelines for Handling Gear

- Gillnet gear should be set and/or fished to achieve maximum net **tautness**. This will prevent turtles from becoming entangled in the net in the case of an encounter.
- Scan net as far ahead as possible to sight turtles in advance and reduce the risk of jerking turtles out of the water.
- Vessel operators are required to check nets every 0.5 to 2 hours (50 CFR§ 635.21 (e) (3) (vi)).

#### Upon Sighting a Turtle

- **Slow vessel** and adjust direction to move towards the turtle. Once turtle is alongside, place the vessel in **neutral**.
- Slowly retrieve the net, avoiding tugging or yanking motions.
- Considering the size of the turtle, sea conditions, and safety of crew, determine whether the turtle can be boated. (All turtles should be **boated if possible**.)

#### Guidelines for Turtles Boated

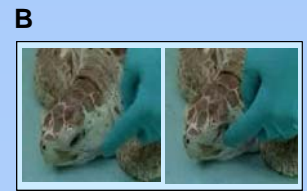
- **Boat the turtle** using a dipnet or large turtle hoist. Avoid pulling up the turtle by the gear it is entangled in, as this could injure the animal. Gaffs may only be used to control the fishing gear, **DO NOT USE GAFFS OR SHARP OBJECTS** to retrieve the turtle.
- **Support the turtle** on a cushioned surface, such as a tire, while it is onboard.
- If the turtle cannot easily be disentangled from the net, **carefully cut the net** off the turtle. **Blunt-sided** line cutters such as first-aid clippers are preferred. If one-sided cutters/clippers are used, carefully slide the blunt end under the line or net you want to cut. Attempt to remove any lines or net attached to the turtle.
- **Identify** the species of turtle and record when and where the interaction occurred.

#### Guidelines for Turtles NOT Boated

- If the turtle is too large to be boated, control the turtle with a turtle tether if possible and bring the turtle close to the vessel.
- **Identify** the species of turtle and record when and where the interaction occurred.
- Try to work the turtle free from the net while the turtle is next to the boat. Use line cutters/clippers with a handle extension or first-aid clippers to cut the net off the turtle if necessary. Carefully slide the **BLUNT END** of the line cutter under the line or net you want to remove. Attempt to remove any lines or net attached to the turtle.

#### Guidelines for UNCONSCIOUS Turtles

- Place the turtle on its lower shell and **elevate** its hindquarters approximately 6 inches to permit the lungs to drain off water (Figure A).
- Keep the **skin and eyes moist** by covering the turtle with a moist towel or periodically spraying it with water while it is onboard. Place the turtle in the shade if necessary, while maintaining its body temperature above 60°F.
- Check for muscle **reflexes** approximately every 3 hours by touching the eyelid or tail (Figure B). An unconscious, but live turtle may or may not respond to touch.
- Be patient. Sea turtles caught and held underwater are stressed and may take some time to revive. If the turtle has shown no sign of life before returning to port, or after 24 hours on deck, it may safely be considered dead. Release the turtle in the water in a non-fishing area.



#### Contact Information

More information on releasing sea turtles is available on the on the web at: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms> and in the publication, *Careful Release Protocols for Sea Turtle Release with Minimal Injury*, which is available on this website. Call (301) 713-2347 to obtain a copy of the report or for additional copies of this placard.

# Stop!

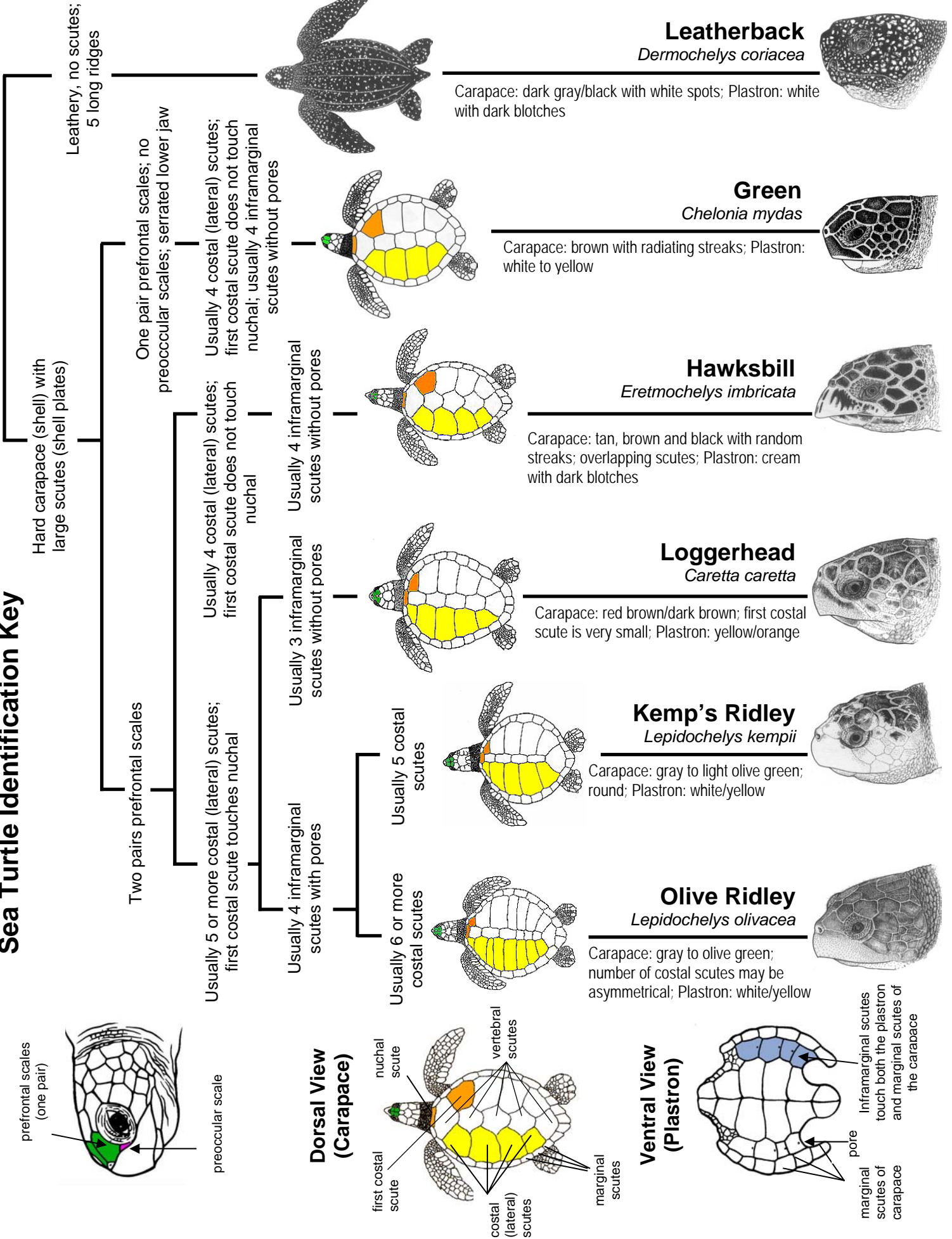
#### GUIDELINES FOR RELEASING A TURTLE

- (1) **STOP VESSEL** and place in **NEUTRAL**;
- (2) **Ease turtle** gently into the water, head first, through cut-out door if so equipped;
- (3) Observe that turtle is safely **away from the vessel** before engaging the propeller and move 1 nmi before continuing fishing operations.

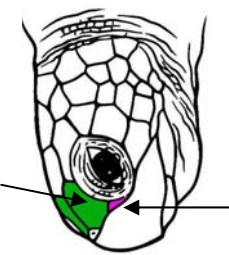


Typical adult colors are described here; colors may differ, particularly in hatchlings and juveniles

# Sea Turtle Identification Key

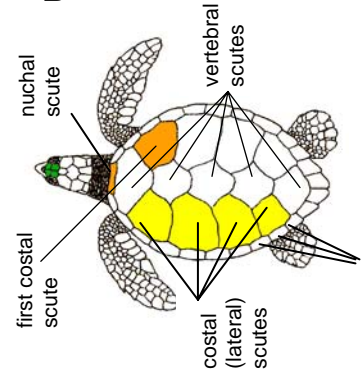


prefrontal scales (one pair)



preoccular scale

## Dorsal View (Carapace)



## Ventral View (Plastron)

