

POPULATIONS OF ATLANTIC RIDLEY SEA TURTLES (LEPIDOCHELYS KEMPI) IN APALACHEE BAY, FLORIDA, COASTAL WATERS

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A total of 106 Kemp's ridley sea turtles, (Lepidochelys kempi), was captured, measured, tagged, and released from 1984-1988 in Wakulla and Franklin counties, Florida. Turtles ranged from 20.3 to 57.9 cm straight line carapace length (mean 36.4 cm), and weights ranged from 635 grams to 13.7 kg. All turtles were immature and were captured in all months of the year. Turtles taken in winter were significantly larger than those taken in summer. Carapace epibionts and mud stains suggested that two individuals had over-wintered. Turtles were taken over sand, mud, and seagrass bottoms and at depths ranging from 30 cm to 32 m. A significant length-depth relationship was observed. The smallest turtles were taken from depths < 9 m. Four recoveries were made, three of which returned to their point of capture upon release. Offshore occurrences during winter months to depths > 30 m for three individuals were observed.

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