

of Mexico. It appears that they reach north Florida during late January. After wintering in Florida until March, some move north again to feed. Eventually (perhaps years later) they move into the Gulf of Mexico and take up residence as mature turtles.

Crabs are often the Kemp's ridley dietary staple. In the Gulf of Mexico they eat swimming crabs of the family Portunidae, such as the blue crabs (*Callinectes sapidus* and *Callinectes similis*), swimmers (*Portunus gibbesii*), lady crabs (*Ovalipes floridanus*), Dolly Varden crabs (*Hepatus epheliticus*), spider crabs (*Libinia*), and the purse crab (*Persephona mediterranea*). Along Long Island, New York, they eat spider crabs (*Libinia emarginatus*), rock crabs (*Cancer irroratus*), and lady crabs (*Ovalipes ocellatus*). They also eat some molluscs, such as the bay scallop (*Argopectin irradians*), blue mussel (*Mytilus edulis*), and New England basket whelk (*Nassarius trivittatus*). A few even eat sea horses (*Hippocampus erectus*).

In some areas Kemp's ridleys seem to eat more of the fast-swimming, more mobile crabs than do loggerheads. This may be because of their body shape, which is proportionately wider than that of loggerheads, allowing them to turn within a shorter radius. Kemp's ridleys can spin around 180 degrees, horizontally, to chase prey. They are extremely quick and agile and their disk-shaped shells give them great maneuverability and thus an ability to chase and catch more mobile crabs.

Hope for the Future

Despite all of the difficulties in launching and continuing a conservation program involving two nations, the Kemp's ridley program has been a wonderful success. We have pulled this species back from the brink of extinction and established a basis for its further recovery. The future is bright.

Nevertheless, the ridley population today is still a tenth or less of that documented in Herrera's 1947 film, and that number was undoubtedly greatly reduced from earlier in the twentieth century. There is, then, no reason to be complacent. The species is still critically endangered. While recent population increases of 12-19 percent a year will not continue indefinitely, they do indicate that we are doing the right things for this species. We must keep up the effort.

The future of Kemp's ridley conservation must be one of continued vigilance. More biologists and more volunteers are needed to go to Mexico to walk the beaches, find and protect clutches of eggs, monitor nesting females, and to work with local communities and schools. More biologists and volunteers are needed in Texas to look for nesting ridleys and to protect their nests. TEDs are key to protecting juveniles and adults in the ocean. Educating fishermen and strong law enforcement are essential components of this effort. Communities near nesting beaches must be developed economically to provide alternatives to egg poaching.

There is still much to do now and there will be much to do for the next generation, as well. With hard work and luck the Kemp's ridley may once again be a common sight in the Gulf of Mexico. ~



Kemp's ridley turtles congregate off the nesting beach at Rancho Nuevo, Mexico. These turtles will survive only if the strong bilateral conservation program involving the United States and Mexico is maintained.