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JUVENILE HEAD-STARTED KEMP'S RIDLEYS FOUND IN FLOATING GRASS MATS

Two head-started Kemp's ridley turtles (Lepidochelys kempi) of the 1987 year-class, released off North Padre Island, Texas on 17 May 1988, were found motionless and drifting in sargassum weed and in floating sea grasses (possibly Syringodium and Thalassia). The first turtle, bearing tag# PPR408, was found floating in a sargassum weed line by a sport fisherman 25 nm [nautical miles] south of Mobile, Alabama in 34 m of water on 7 October 1988, 143 days after release. The angler reported: "I originally thought the turtle was entangled, since it was motionless when I approached it." No measurements were taken, but a photograph was enclosed with the report and the turtle appeared healthy. At the time of its release off North Padre Island, this turtle measured 19 cm straight carapace length (SCL). The fisherman released the turtle at the site of capture.

The second turtle, bearing tag# PPR673 was found by scallop fishermen 2.5 nm off Horseshoe and Pepperfish Keys on the north-central Gulf coast of Florida on 5 August 1989, 445 days after release. They observed it "in floating [sea] grass that had gathered in circular whorls in an area the size of a living room." Two small remoras were attached to the turtle's rear flippers. The fishermen recalled: "As we approached, it raised its head briefly, then dropped it down again under water and was motionless. We assumed it was near death, unable to move." A landing net was placed under the turtle's body. When lifted, "the remoras darted away, and the turtle suddenly came alive and went into a frenzy of activity." The estimated size of this turtle was 33 cm long and 33 cm wide. At the time of its release in 1988 the turtle measured 20.7 cm SCL and 19.4 cm straight carapace width. The fishermen also noted that the flipper tag was "nearly grown over by the increasing size of the animal and its underneath side had huge barnacles attached, so firmly anchored we could not remove them without risking injury to the turtle." A photograph was included in the fishermen's report and the turtle appeared healthy. It was released at the site of capture.

Young sea turtles may use sargassum mats for refugia or foraging, as evidenced by numerous reports of loggerhead, green, and hawksbill turtle neonates and juveniles associated with sargassum in the pelagic habitat (Carr 1987). In contrast, there are no reports of young Kemp's ridleys in pelagic zone sargassum weed or sea grass mats (Collard 1990). There are two reports, however, associating Kemp's ridleys with sargassum washed ashore on beaches. Fontaine et al. (1988) reported a post-hatchling Kemp's ridley (5.0 cm SCL) found in sargassum weed in the surf wash line on Galveston Island, Texas in July 1988. In 1983, most of the 1982 year-class of head-started Kemp's ridleys were released near sargassum mats with the expectation that mats would provide food and shelter. Unfortunately, nearly 7% of these animals washed ashore with 10 days of release and most had ingested tar and oil (Fontaine et al. 1989; Manzella et al. 1988).

Whether juvenile Kemp's ridleys utilize floating vegetation as a source of food or for protection while resting remains unknown, but the observations of these fishermen confirm that some individuals spend at least part of their time in these pelagic habitats. A better

understanding of what turtles do at sea could be obtained if more sightings of the type reported here were documented, especially for wild post-hatchlings.

The authors thank Mr. Don Miller of Pascagoula, Mississippi and Mr. Ed Sapp and Mr. Richard Boles of Gainesville, Florida for their keen observations and for taking the time to report the information on these turtles to the proper authorities.

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PROBLEMS FOR TURTLE PROTECTION ON ZAKYNTHOS

Efforts to protect the largest Mediterranean population of loggerhead turtles, on Zakynthos in Greece, have been facing setbacks this year with the emergence of a new player in the arena. As an article in *Oryx* (24:15-22) explained, turtle conservation work on the island has been fraught with difficulties despite the efforts of voluntary bodies and government authorities. Tourism has become so important for the local economy that efforts to restrict development on the turtle nesting beaches have met with strong local resistance. Illegal tavernas are still being built, sunbeds and umbrellas increase in numbers, and pedalloes and canoes are left on the beaches all night, all in contravention of the law.

Now some local landowners have formed what they call a turtle protection society (ZEMILDICA). They argue that, being islanders, they know best how to protect the turtles and they claim that the animals are not suffering from the tourist developments. Despite the fact that their claims are invalid, that they have no scientific expertise, and that they are clearly motivated by a desire to expand and benefit from the tourist industry, the Greek Government this year gave them half the Dr2 million (which comes from Zakynthian authorities, the EC and WWF) allocated for sea turtle protection.