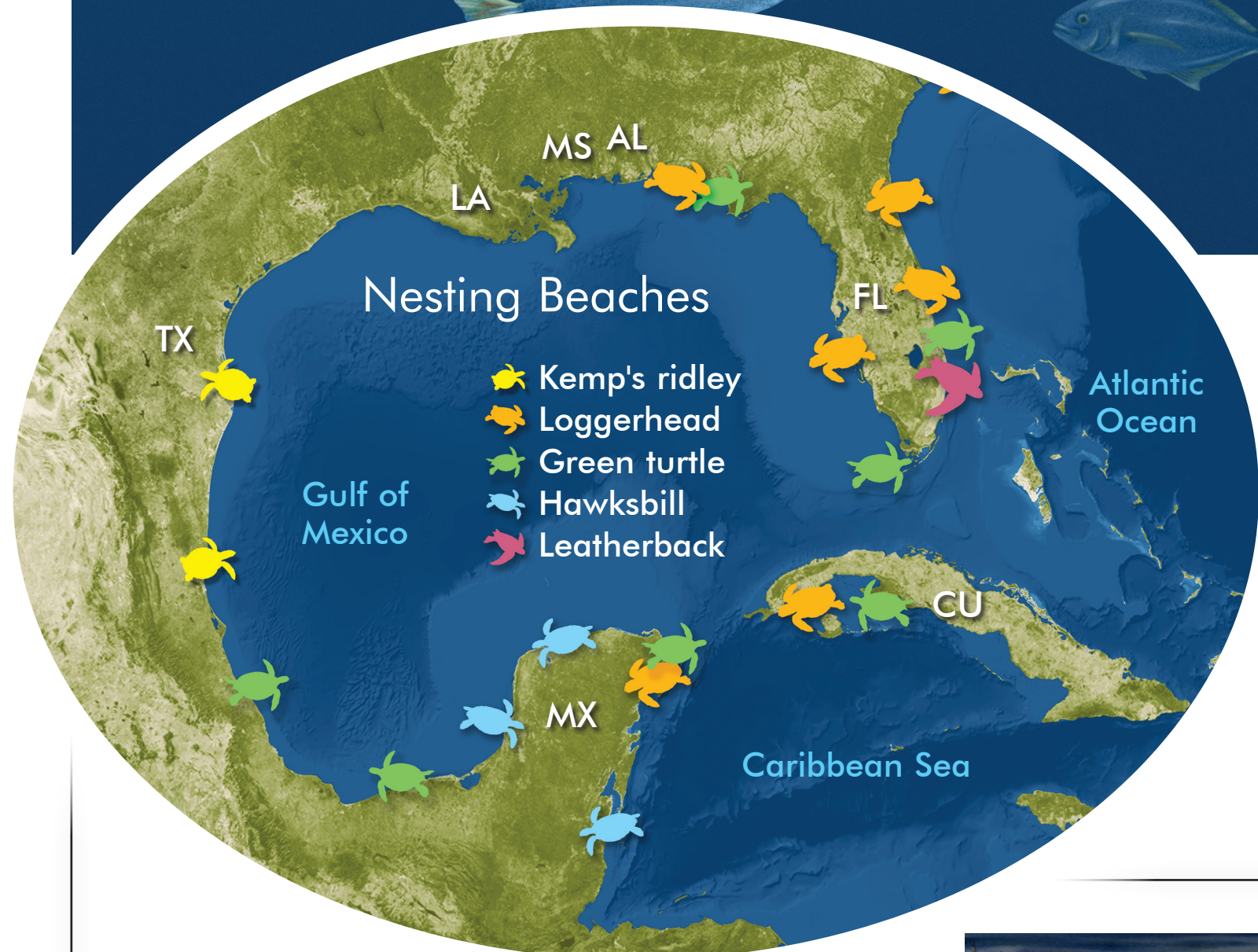


Sea Turtles in Texas

The Texas coast provides important nesting beaches, bays, estuaries, and offshore habitats for five sea turtle species. All are threatened with extinction, but thanks to long-term conservation programs, our state's sea turtles are on the rise!



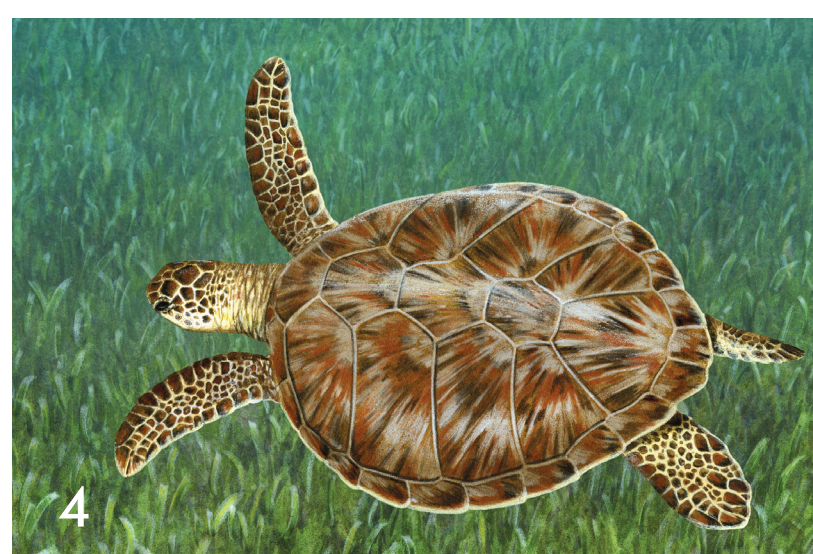
Where Do They Come From?

A sea turtle's origin is its nesting beach. The map to the left highlights major nesting beaches for sea turtles of the Gulf of Mexico. Many turtles swimming in the gulf emerged as hatchlings from nests on gulf beaches, but most green turtles and leatherbacks probably came from beaches farther south in the Caribbean Sea. Significant gulf loggerhead nesting occurs in southwestern Florida and the Panhandle. Important hawksbill nesting takes place along the gulf's southern beaches. Nearly all of the world's Kemp's ridleys nest on beaches of the western Gulf of Mexico.

Where in Texas Do Sea Turtles Live?

Sea turtles depend on a variety of coastal and open-sea habitats in the gulf.

- 1. Beaches** — Female sea turtles lay eggs in nests on sandy beaches. After incubating for about 2 months, nests produce hatchlings that disperse away from land.
- 2. Open sea** — Juveniles grow up in rafts of *Sargassum* seaweed. Leatherbacks spend the majority of their lives in open, blue water.
- 3. Coastal waters** — Loggerheads, Kemp's ridleys, and green turtles feed in estuaries and other shallow coastal waters.
- 4. Seagrass pastures** — All species other than the leatherback depend on seagrasses. Green turtles eat seagrass, and the other species feed on invertebrates living in seagrass.
- 5. Reefs** — Deep offshore reefs support foraging loggerheads, and shallow coral reefs are the principal habitat for hawksbills.
- 6. Migration corridors** — Sea turtles need unimpeded corridors for their migration routes between foraging areas and nesting beaches.



The Species

Of seven sea turtle species worldwide, five species occur in Texas.

Kemp's Ridley — The official Texas state sea turtle. This rarest of all sea turtles resides mostly in the Gulf of Mexico and nests on beaches in Texas and Mexico. Texas bays and nearshore waters provide crucial feeding habitat and migratory corridors for Kemp's ridleys. Adults feed primarily on crabs.



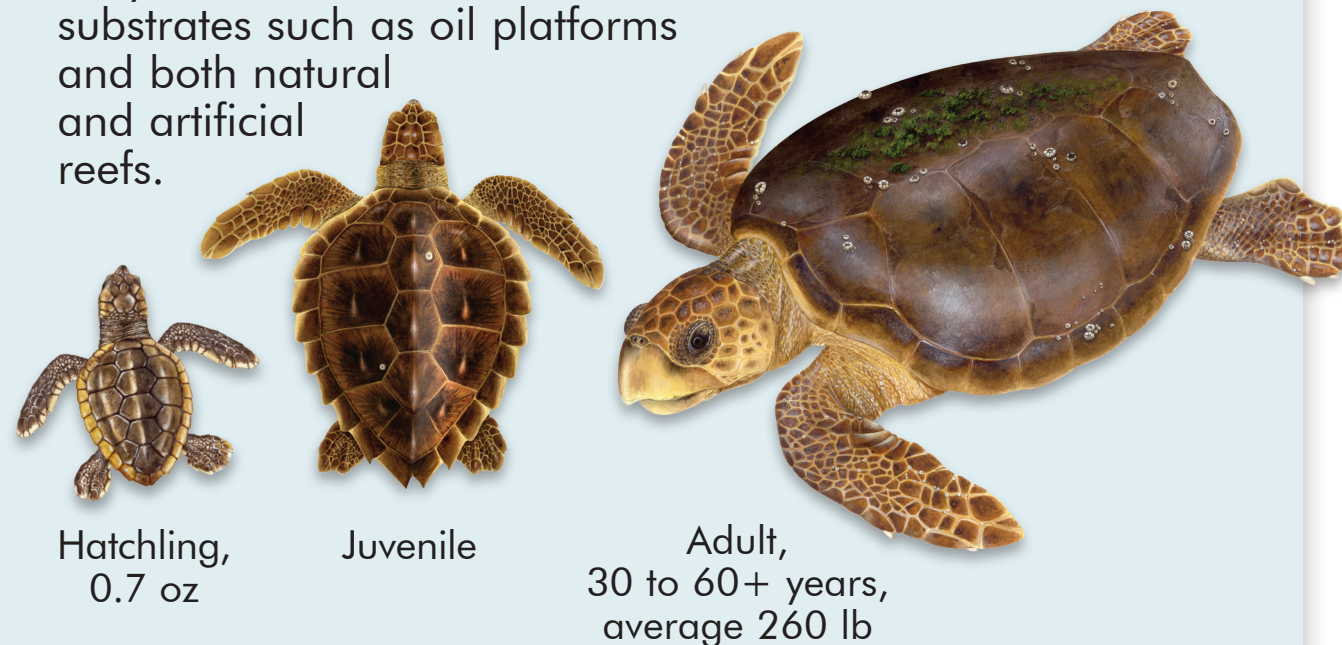
Hatchling,
0.6 oz

Juvenile

Adult, 12 to 30+ years,
average 85 lb

Loggerhead Sea Turtle

Adult and subadult loggerheads found in Texas' nearshore waters feed on crabs, mollusks, and sea pens (a soft coral). They also live and feed offshore in association with hard substrates such as oil platforms and both natural and artificial reefs.



Hatchling,
0.7 oz

Juvenile

Adult,
30 to 60+ years,
average 260 lb

Green Turtle

A commercial sea turtle harvest in Texas almost eliminated green turtles from the state's waters by the early 1900s. But the tide has turned — thanks to over 30 years of successful conservation programs, juvenile green turtles are now the most abundant sea turtle in Texas. These turtles live in shallow waters and feed on algae near rock jetties and on seagrasses within bays and estuaries. Adult females nest on beaches in Texas and Mexico, as well as throughout the southeastern U.S. and wider Caribbean.



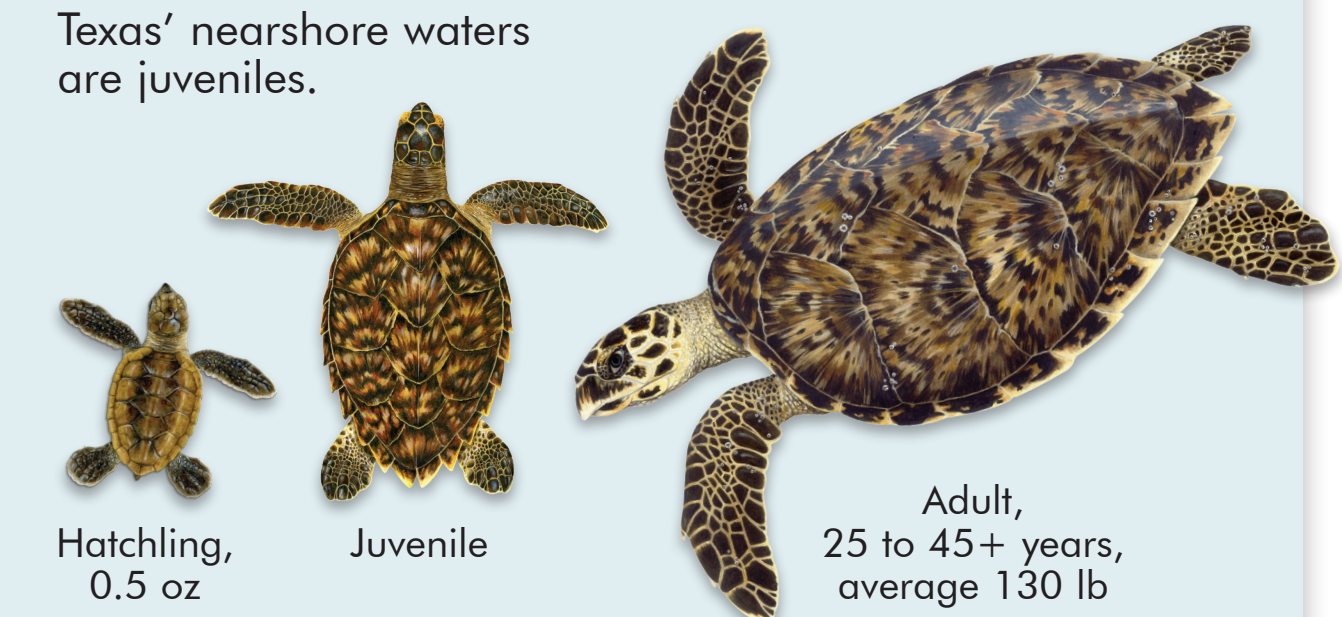
Hatchling,
1 oz

Juvenile

Adult,
30 to 70+ years,
average 310 lb

Hawksbill

Hawksbills are most commonly found on reefs, but also associate with mangroves, feeding primarily on sponges and colonial anemones. Most of the hawksbills found in Texas' nearshore waters are juveniles.



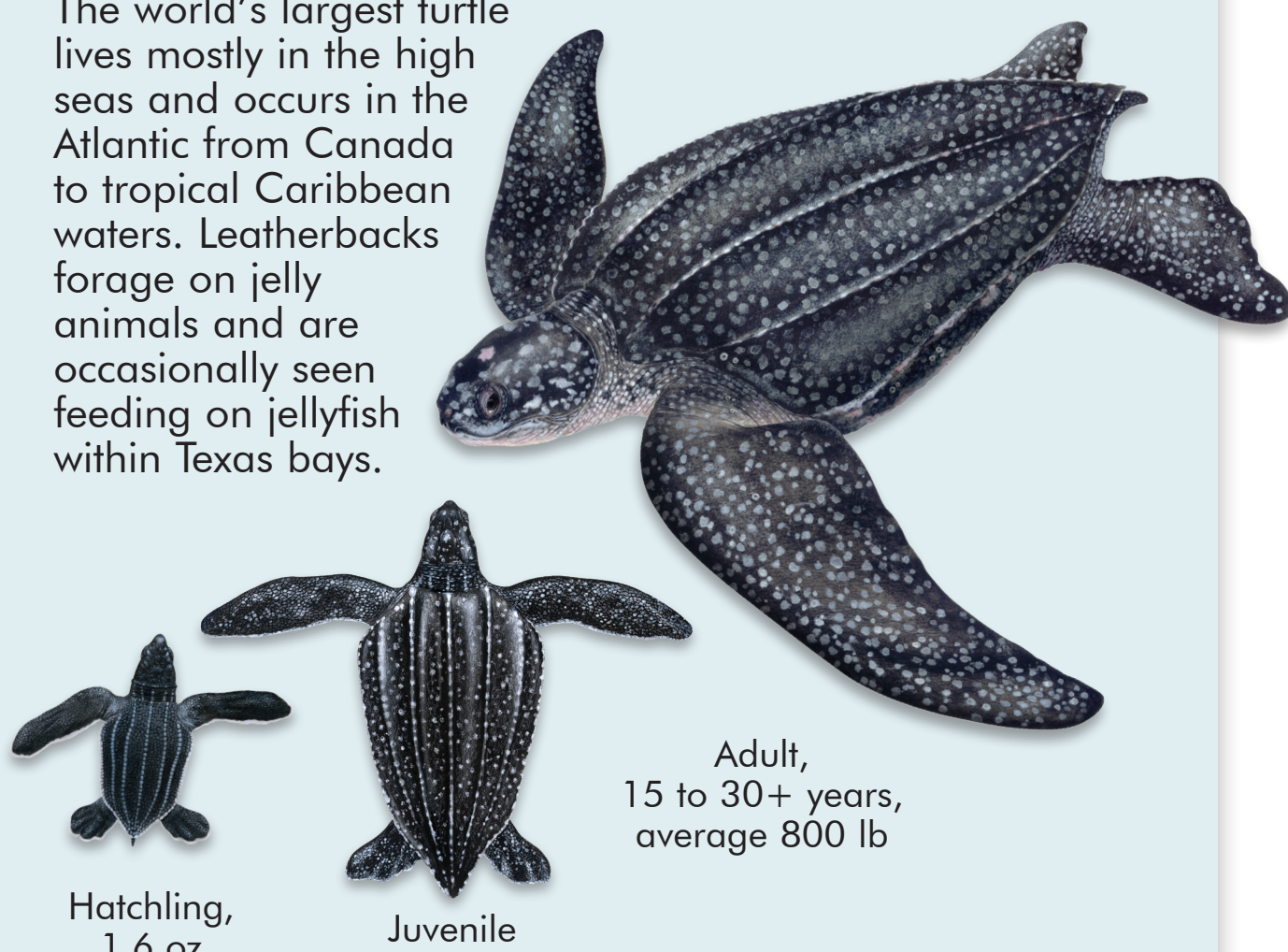
Hatchling,
0.5 oz

Juvenile

Adult,
25 to 45+ years,
average 130 lb

Leatherback

The world's largest turtle lives mostly in the high seas and occurs in the Atlantic from Canada to tropical Caribbean waters. Leatherbacks forage on jelly animals and are occasionally seen feeding on jellyfish within Texas bays.



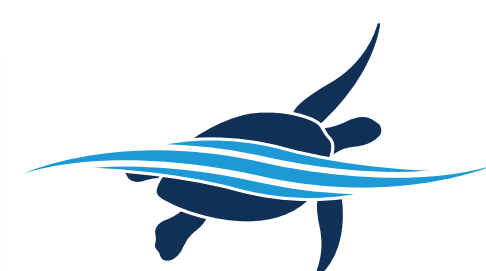
Hatchling,
1.6 oz

Juvenile

Adult,
15 to 30+ years,
average 800 lb

Sea Grant
Texas
AT TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

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