

## Remains of a female Kemp's ridley sea turtle *Lepidochelys kempii* found on the north Somerset coast of Britain

DAVE WILLIS

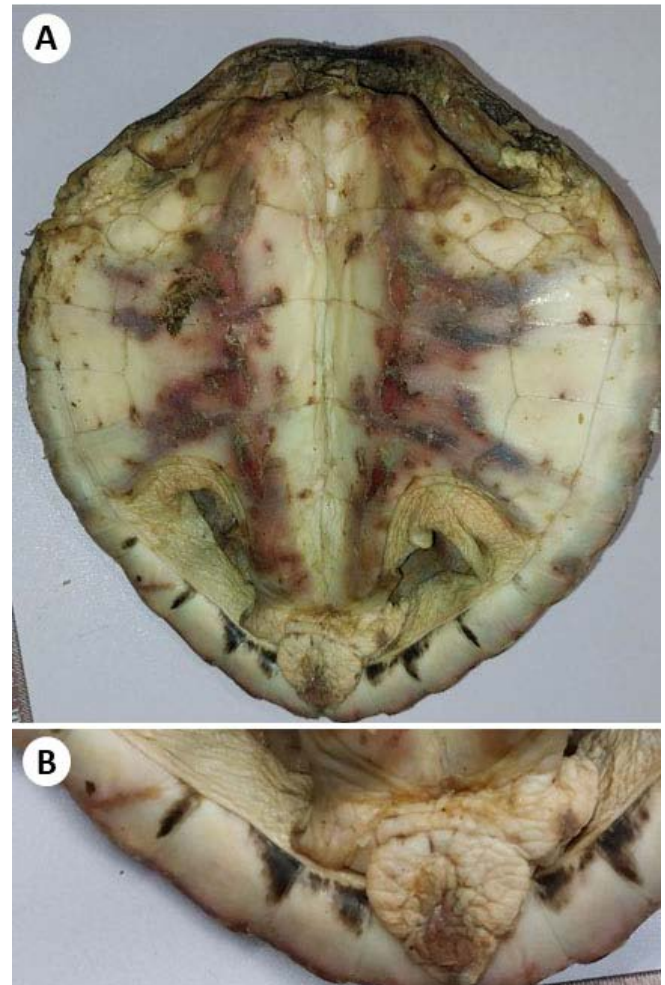
Hertfordshire Amphibian and Reptile Group  
Author e-mail: [davewillisbhs@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:davewillisbhs@yahoo.co.uk)

Kemp's ridley sea turtles *Lepidochelys kempii* are the world's rarest and most endangered marine chelonian (Wibbels & Bevan, 2018). They are found primarily in the Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean, and in warmer Atlantic waters but have long been known to visit British and European waters as vagrants (Ernst & Barbour, 1989).

On 17 December 2021, the remains of a Kemp's ridley were recovered by the author from the strandline of Kilve



**Figure 1.** Carapace of a Kemp's ridley sea turtle washed up on the north Somerset coast **A.** Anterior view showing strong keel **B.** Dorsal view.



**Figure 2.** Ventral view of a Kemp's ridley sea turtle washed up on the north Somerset coast- **A.** Plastron, **B.** Cloaca and short tail (indicating a female specimen)

beach, Somerset, on the southern side of the Bristol Channel (51° 11'26" N, 3° 14'21" W). The specimen weighed 371 g and had a carapace with a distinct keel (Fig. 1A). The carapace was 215 mm long and 195 mm wide (Fig. 1B); adults have a carapace length of at least 550 mm, making this a young specimen. The plastron was 160 mm long with a left and right row of four inframarginal scutes, each with a pore (Fig. 2A). Some soft tissue remained including the tail and cloaca, indicating relatively recent mortality. The tail did not extend past the posterior carapace margin indicating that the turtle was female (Fig. 2B).

Storm Arwen and associated weather patterns appear to have been responsible for the arrival of this species in British waters; in December 2021 a live specimen was also washed up on a beach in north Wales (Baynes, 2021). The current record was submitted to Somerset Amphibian and Reptile Group on the day of discovery. It has also been submitted to the Marine Conservation Society stranding database. Fewer than 75 specimens have been found since records began in 1748. The closest previous Kemp's ridley record was on the northern side of the Bristol Channel and a little further west at Tresilian Bay in 2012, making the current record the deepest known penetration of the Bristol Channel (NBN, 2021).

## REFERENCES

- Baynes, M. (2021). Available at: <https://news.sky.com/story/very-rare-sea-turtle-washes-up-on-welsh-beach-after-storm-arwen-12483679> Accessed on 30/12/21.
- Ernst, C.H & Barbour, R.W. (1989). *Turtles of the World*. Washington DC: Smithsonian Institute Press. 313 pp.
- National Biodiversity Network (2021). *Lepidochelys kempii* (Garman, 1880) Available at: <https://species.nbnatlas.org/species/NBNSYS0000183369> Accessed on 30/12/21.
- Wibbels, T. & Bevan, E. (2018). *The conservation status of the Kemp's Ridley worldwide*. Available at: <https://www.seaturtlestatus.org/articles/2018/2/15/the-conservation-status-of-the-kemps-ridley-worldwide> Accessed on 30/12/21.

*Accepted: 5 January 2022*