



## Rare Species Documentation Protocol

### Why do we need documentation for rare species?

In addition to loggerheads, green turtles and leatherbacks, two other species of sea turtles occasionally nest on Florida's beaches: Kemp's ridleys and hawksbills. For these two occasional nesters and for green turtles on the west coast (where nesting by this species is less common than on the east coast), species documentation is required. Even if you have had these species nest on your beaches before, documentation is still required. This documentation is necessary to ensure that the data in the nesting databases (SNBS and INBS) are as accurate as possible. Management decisions, including permitting, often take into account whether the species that are nesting in an area are Endangered or Threatened and thus correct species identifications are essential.

### Why are track images not considered adequate documentation for Kemp's ridley and hawksbill nests?

Loggerheads, Kemp's ridleys and hawksbills all have alternating gaits, and they overlap in nesting season and track width. This overlap makes track images unreliable for species identification.

### Hawksbills (East and West coasts)

#### Documentation Accepted:

1. Genetic sample (must be collected even if images are available).
2. Images (useful but must be accompanied by genetic sample)
  - Nesting female
  - Crawl and nest
  - Hatchlings

### Kemp's ridleys (East and West coasts)

#### Documentation Accepted:

1. Genetic sample (even if the nesting female is photographed, please collect a genetic sample)
2. Images
  - Nesting female (please additionally collect a genetic sample)
  - Crawl and nest (useful but must be accompanied by genetic sample)
  - Hatchlings (useful but must be accompanied by genetic sample)

### Green Turtles (West coast only)

#### Documentation Accepted:

1. Genetic sample (not necessary if images of the **nesting female** are submitted immediately and verified by FWC, OR images of **hatchlings** found alive or dead in the nest at hatching are submitted to FWC)
2. Images (good-quality images of any of the following will suffice for species identification)
  - Nesting female
  - Crawl and nest
  - Hatchlings

## Instructions for Genetic samples

### ORDER OF PREFERENCE OF GENETIC SAMPLES:

- Dead hatchling, dead embryo, or tissue sample (one flipper if fresh, flipper plus sloughed skin of flipper and sloughed scutes of carapace, if decomposed) stored in 95% ethanol buffer in vial provided by FWC.
- AND EITHER OF THE FOLLOWING
- One undeveloped egg stored in ethanol buffer in vial supplied by FWC (preferred over hatched egg shells)
  - Two hatched egg shells stored in ethanol buffer in vial supplied by FWC

Call or email Beth Brost ([Beth.Brost@myfwc.com](mailto:Beth.Brost@myfwc.com), 727-502-4738) when you think you have had a rare species on the nesting beach, to consult about the necessary documentation and to arrange delivery of vials with buffer and shipping labels that permit the ethanol. Some vials will be stored at strategic sites around the state. **BE SURE TO LABEL THE VIAL** with the permit holder's name, the beach name, and the nest date (spell out the month). Use a permanent marker because ethanol can dissolve regular ink. Store a dead hatchling or flipper in a separate vial from undeveloped eggs or hatched eggshells. If you have genetic samples from more than one nest, the samples should be placed in separate vials. Do not freeze the sample, if at all possible. Samples can be held in the refrigerator or on ice for the short-term until placed in the vials with buffer.

**Instructions for photographs.** Please take several photos (dorsal and ventral views of entire hatchling or dorsal view of nesting female, and close-up of the head from above and from the side). It is important to use your camera's macro setting (usually a flower icon), to nearly fill the image frame with the hatchling, and to use the highest quality image setting. For crawls and nests, photograph the incoming and outgoing tracks, the nest, and any distinctive marks such as tail drags or pokes. Shoot into the sun early in the morning to get good shadow on the crawls.

- **Images of nesting females, tracks and nests of rare species should be emailed to FWC immediately.** Nests should be carefully marked so that they can be found for inventory. Images of hatchlings should be submitted after nest evaluations. Please email images to [Beth.Brost@MyFWC.com](mailto:Beth.Brost@MyFWC.com). These records will be kept on file with the annual report.

Thank you for your assistance.