

IDENTIFYING SEA TURTLES

Kemp's ridley hatchlings on the beaches of Padre Island National Seashore (NPS photo).



WITH BUDDY BISON



DID YOU KNOW...

that out of the seven sea turtle species found in the world, six of them can be found in U.S. waters and hatch in national parks?

When baby sea turtles emerge from the sand and make their first journey to the water, our national parks provide an essential safe haven for these endangered animals.

During a typical turtle season, Padre Island National Seashore in Texas is home to over 200 nests of Kemp's ridley sea turtle eggs waiting to hatch. As a critically endangered species, these nests account for almost all of the Kemp's ridley sea turtle nests in the entire world!

But how are scientists able to identify different types of sea turtles? What makes them unique?

First, turtles are reptiles and all reptiles have scaly skin. On a turtle shell, the scales are called **scutes**. Since each species of sea turtle has different shapes, sizes, and patterns of scutes, scientists observe these in order to identify a sea turtle's species.

Let's build a lifesize Kemp's ridley sea turtle!

On the following page, observe the pattern of scutes on the Kemp's ridley's shell and the scales on its head. These patterns are unique to this sea turtle.

Using the picture and outlines provided, create your own Kemp's ridley sea turtle out of a large piece of cardboard.

If you don't have a piece of cardboard large enough, you can connect several pieces of cardboard or paper until you have a flat shape at least 2 feet long and 2 feet wide — that's the size of a real adult Kemp's ridley sea turtle!



A female Kemp's ridley sea turtle nesting on Padre Island (NPS photo).

MATERIALS NEEDED

- 1 large piece of cardboard (2x2 ft.)
- scissors
- glue or tape-paper
- pencil/pen-printer (optional)
- ruler-paint/markers



Once you have your 2x2 ft. cardboard, cut out a rounded shape that matches the shape of the shell in the picture below. Remember to make a LARGE, rounded shape that's still 2 feet long and wide at its longest points.

Use the shapes on the following pages as a guide to create the 2 front flippers, 2 back flippers, and tail — or print them out and glue onto your turtle shell later. Draw your own head based on the diagram shown below!

For the scutes, draw the following on paper or cardboard, then cut them out:

-10 rounded rectangles about 10 inches long (labeled "lateral scutes")

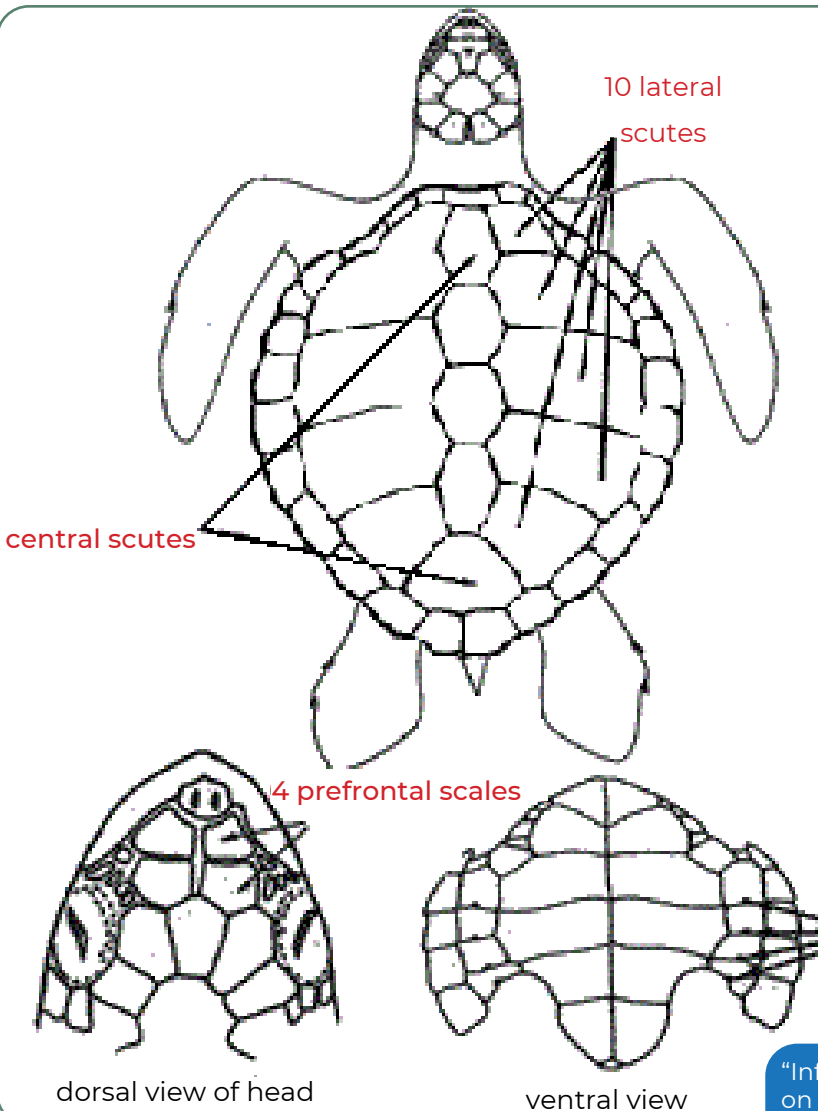
-5 six-sided shapes about the size of a table coaster for the middle (labeled "central scutes")

-4 five-sided shapes for the top of the head (labeled "prefrontal scales")



Following the diagram, glue or tape all of the pieces of your turtle together for one big Kemp's ridley sea turtle.

Share your new creation and turtle identification skills with friends, family, or Buddy Bison at National Park Trust!

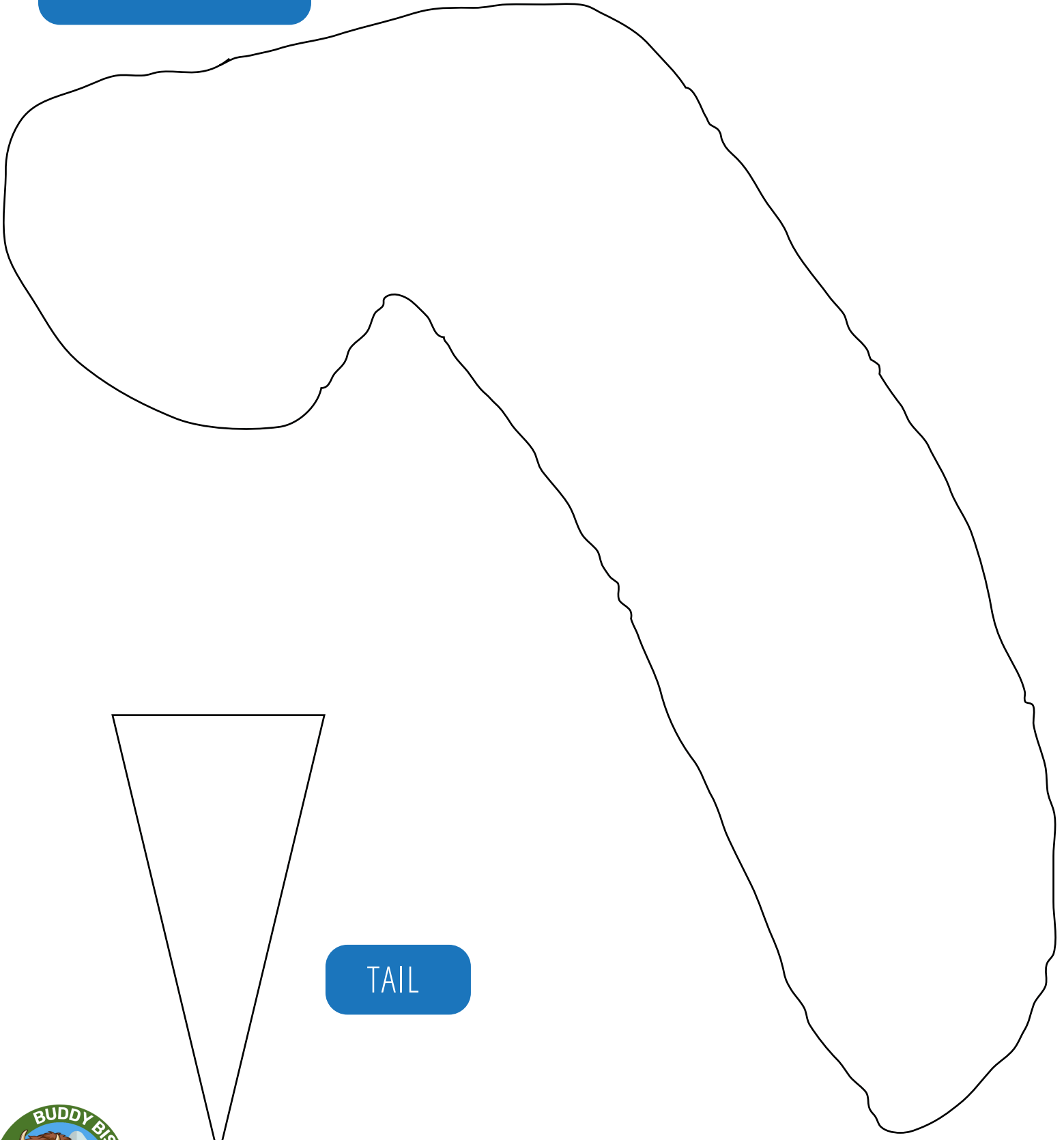


- Almost round-shaped shell
- Olive/grayish green color
- 10 lateral scutes
(5 on each side)
- 5 central scutes
- 4 prefrontal scales
- 4 pairs
inframarginal scutes

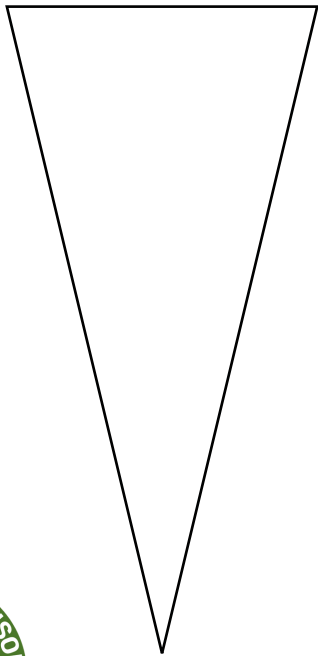
"Inframarginal scutes" are found on the underside of the sea turtle. We aren't focusing on these today, but scientists look at these as well!



FRONT FLIPPER



TAIL



BACK FLIPPER

