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Conservation of an Endangered Species: Turtles and TEDs

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The Kemp's ridley sea turtle is the most endangered marine turtle in the world. It has been estimated that 47,000 females nested in 1947. In 1988 it was estimated that 600 females nested. This precipitous decline is a result of harvesting of turtles and eggs on the nesting beach but even with full protection since 1973 the number of nesting females declines at 3% per year. This decline is primarily a result of accidental drowning of turtles in shrimp trawls. The recovery of this species is dependent upon finding a way to eliminate mortality from shrimping. A device was developed by NOAA-Fisheries which effectively excludes turtles with no significant reduction on shrimp catch and is called a Turtle Excluder Device (TED). Regulations requiring the use of TEDs were developed by NOAA-Fisheries in 1987, however an amendment to the newly authorized Endangered Species Act prevents the use of TEDs until May 1989. In the fall of 1988 almost ~~70~~ 90 dead Kemp's ridley turtles washed ashore dead along the Georgia and northeastern Florida coasts. Evidence suggests that the majority of this mortality is attributable to shrimping which typically peaks in this area in the fall and early winter. The impact of this loss on this species is significant and underlines the need to be able to rapidly implement management measures to save and recover rare species.

Paper presentation

Slide projector required

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