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Scutes Reserved for Living Tags: An Update

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Living tags on carapace scutes are being used, in conjunction with metal flipper tags and magnetic binary coded wires tags (Fontaine et al., 1985, NOAA Tech. Memo, NMFS-SEFC-158) to distinguish year-classes of head-started Kemp's ridley sea turtles, *Lepidochelys kempi* (Caillouet et al., 1986, [MTN 36:5-6](#)).

Originally, neural scutes were among those identified as sites for living-tags for head-started Kemp's ridleys of the 1986, 1987, 1991 and 1992 year-classes. However, we encountered a number of difficulties applying the living-tag to neural scute 4 of turtles from the 1986 year-class. The carapace apparently hardens first along the midline or neural ridge, consequently, the living-tag must be applied to neural scutes much sooner during the head-start period than to other carapace scutes. It is extremely difficult to affix the living-tag tissue graft to neural scutes on small juvenile Kemp's ridleys because the scutes are smaller than the other carapace scutes. Also, when neural scutes are soft enough to receive a living-tag, the turtles are too small to be subjected to the rigors of this tagging technique. Living-tagging of the 1986 year-class on neural scute 4 resulted in a relatively high incidence of tag loss (18%) prior to releasing the turtles.

Therefore, we have dropped neural scutes from the list of scutes designated for living-tagging head-started Kemp's ridleys. The new schedule and locations for living-tags are shown below.

Table 1. Carapacial scutes used or proposed for living-tagging head-started Kemp's ridleys. RC=right costal, LC=left costal, N=neural, LH=left humeral, RH=right humeral, LP=left pectoral, RP=right pectoral, LA=left abdominal.

Year	Scutes
1980	LC2, LC3, RC2, RC3, RC4, N2, N3, LH, LP, LA (some individuals were tagged between scutes RC2 and RC3 RC3 and RC4, LP and RP or LH and RH)
1981	None living tagged
1982	LC31
1983	LC4
1984	RC5
1985	RC5

1986	N4
1987	RC1
1988	LC1
1989	RC4
1990	RC2
1991	LC2
1992	RC3