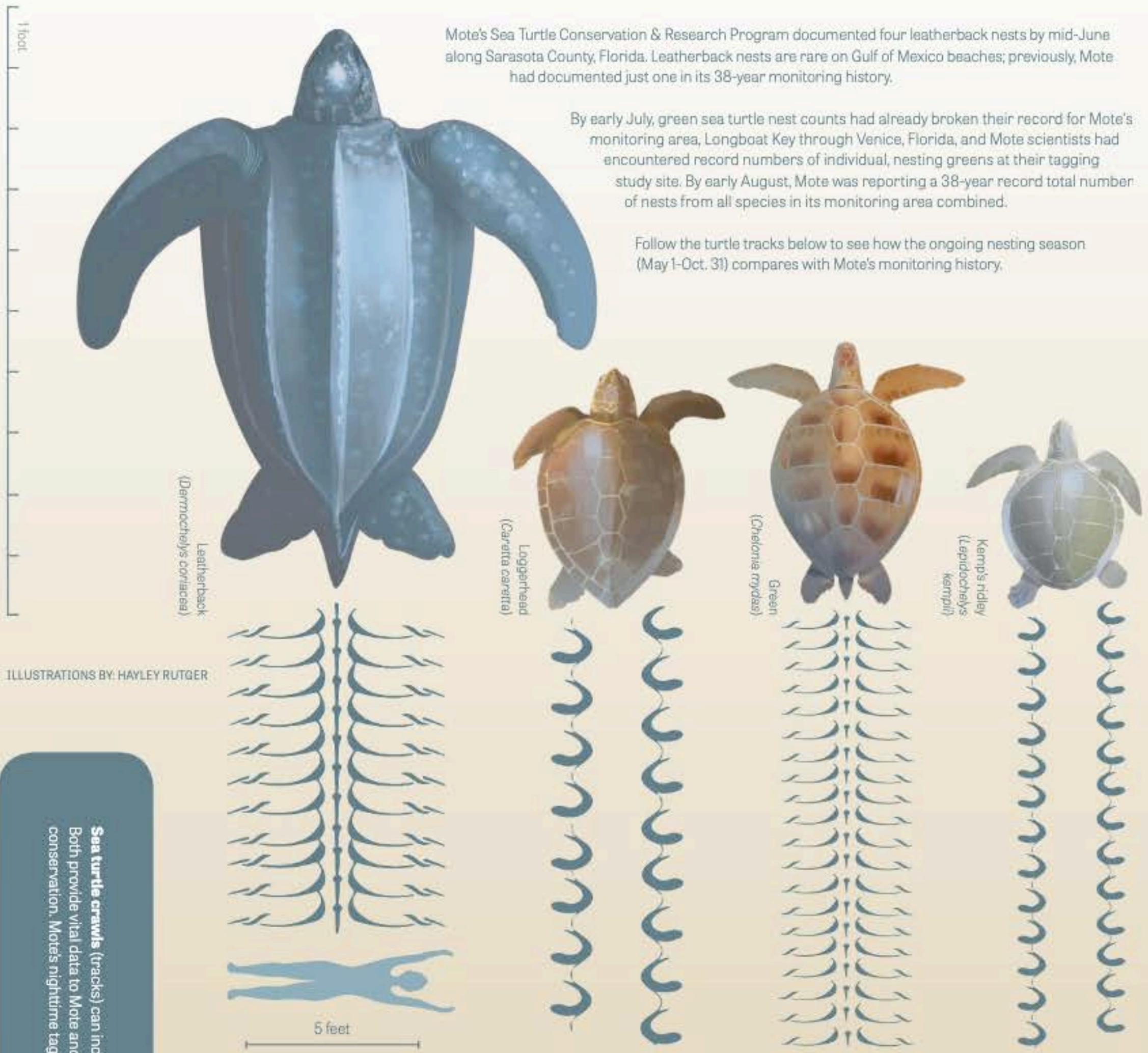


# HUGE YEAR FOR NESTING TURTLES

BY HAYLEY RUTGER

**Summer 2019 brought BIG surprises to the sea turtle nesting beaches monitored by Mote Marine Laboratory, including rare visits from Earth's largest sea turtle species, the leatherback.**



Mote's Sea Turtle Conservation & Research Program documented four leatherback nests by mid-June along Sarasota County, Florida. Leatherback nests are rare on Gulf of Mexico beaches; previously, Mote had documented just one in its 38-year monitoring history.

By early July, green sea turtle nest counts had already broken their record for Mote's monitoring area, Longboat Key through Venice, Florida, and Mote scientists had encountered record numbers of individual, nesting greens at their tagging study site. By early August, Mote was reporting a 38-year record total number of nests from all species in its monitoring area combined.

Follow the turtle tracks below to see how the ongoing nesting season (May 1-Oct. 31) compares with Mote's monitoring history.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY: HAYLEY RUTGER

Sea turtle crawls (tracks) can indicate new nests or "false crawls," when a turtle comes ashore but doesn't nest. Both provide vital data to Mote and other partners who hold government permits for sea turtle research and conservation. Mote's nighttime tagging team documents new and returning turtles.

THEN: 1987-2018	THEN	THEN	THEN
Just <b>one</b> local leatherback nest	<b>49,576</b> local loggerhead nests+	<b>255</b> local green nests	<b>Nine</b> local Kemp's ridley nests
NOW: LATE APRIL - AUG. 4, 2019	NOW	NOW	NOW
<b>Four</b> local leatherback nests*	<b>4,888</b> local loggerhead nests*	<b>170</b> local green nests*	<b>One</b> local Kemp's ridley nest, pending confirmation
<i>Of the nesting species documented by Mote, leatherbacks are the rarest. They nest more often on Florida's east coast.</i>	* 2019 nest count has already broken local record by Aug. 4, well before season ends on Oct. 31 + Includes three loggerhead/hawksbill turtle hybrid nests.		

**Sea turtles laid a whopping 5,063 nests total between late April and Aug. 4, 2019, in Mote's monitoring area, breaking their 38-year record for total nest count per year well before the end of nesting season, Oct. 31.**

From 1987-2018, Mote documented and protected 49,841 local nests on Longboat Key through Venice. In recent years, locally uncommon species have shown exciting increases, including exponential growth of green sea turtle nesting.

To better understand where these greens migrate after nesting, Mote scientists placed satellite-linked tracking tags onto seven nesting greens in 2019, a new annual record for Mote's work with this species and a source of critical data for conservation and management. Follow tagged turtles at: [mote.org/seaturtletracking](http://mote.org/seaturtletracking).