

S1E6: The Riddle of the Ridley

The Gulf Podcast

Introduction

[Dr. Jen Brown]: You're listening to The Gulf Podcast. Hi everyone, this is Jen, thanks for tuning in. On today's program, we're going to learn about a twenty-year scientific mystery. It's the riddle of the ridley. Kemp's ridley sea turtles are one of five species of sea turtles that can be found in the Gulf of Mexico. And they're the world's most endangered sea turtle so we're also going to hear about recovery efforts along the Texas coast.

The next episode will cover the sea turtle rescues that took place during the deadly winter storm that Texas had back in February.

Before we jump into today's Kemp's ridley story, though, I'd like to tell you that The Gulf Podcast is made possible by the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. For over twenty years, they've sought science-driven solutions for Gulf of Mexico problems in order to advance long-term sustainable use and conservation.

<<musical interlude>>¹

Chapter One: The Riddle of the Ridley

[Brown]: Archie Carr was a string bean southern boy destined to become one of the greatest biologists of his generation. Like many southerners, he loved the outdoors and grew up catching frogs and snakes and turtles. His father, a minister, often brought Archie and his brother hunting and fishing.² This love of nature continued as an adult. Carr eventually went on to become one of the world's experts in sea turtles. He lived a charming life. He taught classes at the University of Florida, studied sea turtles throughout the Caribbean, and wrote about his travels.

But Archie Carr had a curious problem. It was a mystery that took almost twenty years to solve. The riddle of the ridley.

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¹ Cory Gray, "Mystery T," *Music for Film and TV*, May 21, 2015, https://freemusicarchive.org/music/Cory_Gray/20170730112627917/Mystery_T. This song is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License (CC-BY-NC).

² Frederick Rowe Davis, *The Man Who Saved Sea Turtles: Archie Carr and the Origins of Conservation Biology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 12–17.

³ Cory Gray, "Mystery T."

Carr first came across a Kemp's ridley sea turtle in the 1930s in the Florida Keys. At that time, "practically nothing was known" about the species he said.⁴ Scientists knew they existed but didn't know details. Where did they nest? Where did they go? Archie Carr followed the clues.

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[Dr. Archie Carr read by Max McClure]: *"Imagine my state of mind, then, when I had completed a carefully spaced series of visits all the way around the Caribbean and had found no sign either of ridleys or of people who knew them, anywhere in a dozen countries and islands. I went out with turtle-hunters and looked at turtles in crawls, and at shells on trash heaps, and at stuffed turtles on museum shelves. I walked some of the finest turtle beaches in the hemisphere. I saw a lot of things, but no ridleys. Everywhere I went the people knew four kinds of sea turtles, and none of them was the ridley."*⁵

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[Brown]: Carr searched for years trying to find traces. He canvassed. He grilled locals. He even made friends with poachers trying to get information. When he asked the fishermen in Florida, they called them bastard turtles because they'd never seen ridleys nest.⁷ Carr knew Kemp's ridleys could be found in Florida and the Gulf, and occasionally wash up in Europe. But he still couldn't find a hatchling or a nesting beach. It was a great mystery.

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[Brown]: But Archie Carr was looking in the wrong spot. Finally, clues came from Mexico and Texas. On the wall of a dingy roadside cantina in Veracruz, he found some shells. During another trip, he came across more shells in a gift shop in Port Isabel. He also corresponded with a man who discovered nests on North Padre Island.⁸ Archie Carr wasn't the only scientist trying to uncover the riddle of the ridley. Little did he know that another scientist in Texas, Dr. Henry Hildebrand, had been conducting his own independent search.

Hildebrand was a longtime biology professor in Corpus Christi and in Kingsville. He had a reputation for being eccentric and reserved—unless he was talking about science.⁹ Hildebrand was actually friends with Hank Compton from Episode Two, at least before Compton's demise

⁴ Archie Carr, *The Windward Road: Adventures of a Naturalist on Remote Caribbean Shores* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), 7.

⁵ Carr, *The Windward Road*, 19.

⁶ Cory Gray, "Mystery T."

⁷ Carr, *The Windward Road*, 12–27.

⁸ Archie Carr, *So Excellent a Fish: A Natural History of Sea Turtles* (1967; reprint, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 118–128.

⁹ See John Goodspeed, "Nutty Professor: The Eccentric Henry Hildebrand Inspired Many Budding Scientists," *Texas Parks and Wildlife* (December 2009): np. Accessed April 2, 2021, <http://www.tpwmagazine.com/archive/2009/dec/legend/>.

into drinking and painting. The two Henrys both enjoyed the company of other social misfits and liked to talk to commercial fishermen and shrimpers.¹⁰ That helped Hildebrand find an important piece of the ridley puzzle. Here he is talking about it almost forty years later in an interview with the Texas Legacy Project:

[Henry Hildebrand]: So, I started asking the fishermen about turtles...In checking fishermen everywhere I—I traveled the coast from Belize to, uh, Cameron, Louisiana, and talked with a lot of people and so forth. I had friends along the coast and they were extremely helpful...A friend of mine located a film in Tampico, Andres Herrera, and he was kind enough to loan it to me and let me copy it, and it showed a mass nesting of turtles.¹¹

[Brown]: The film captured what only locals knew up until then: that Kemp's ridleys arrived every year en masse to nest at Rancho Nuevo, down the coast in Mexican state of Tamaulipas. They called it an *arribada*, an arrival. The year Andres Herrera recorded, in 1947, somewhere between 26,000 to 40,000 Kemp's ridleys showed up.¹² The film revealed a beach packed with turtles. It looked sort of like a spring break crowd on South Padre Island, but with nesting ridleys instead of college students.

Over a dozen years passed before Henry Hildebrand got a copy of the film. And when he did, he made waves unveiling it to the scientific community. Most academic conferences are, well I'm not going to say they're boring, but they're rarely historic. At the 1961 conference for the American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists, however, Hildebrand's film showing was momentous. Archie Carr even made a special trip from Florida to Austin to see the film.

[Archie Carr read by Max McClure]: *"The film was short. It was shaky in places, faded with time, and rainy with scratches. But it was the cinema of the year all the same, the picture of the decade. For me really, it was the movie of all time...To any zoologist, especially to a turtle zoologist and most specifically to me, the film was simply shattering."*¹³

[Brown]: Carr finally had the answer to the riddle of the ridley.

[Archie Carr read by Max McClure]: *"For Henry Hildebrand it was solid reward for his patient ransacking of the Gulf coast of Texas and Mexico for facts behind rumors. For me it was a reverberating answer to a twenty-year-old question."*¹⁴

¹⁰ Interview with Dr. David McKee, February 20, 2018. In his writings, Compton referred to Hildebrand simply as "the biologist."

¹¹ Henry Hildebrand, interviewed by David Todd, Corpus Christi, Texas, February 21, 2000. Conservation History Association of Texas, Texas Legacy Project Records. Part 1, Interview 2070. Accessed November 30, 2015. http://av.cah.utexas.edu/index.php/TexLegacyProj:Henry_Hildebrand_Interview,_Part_1_of_2.

¹² E. Bevan, et al., "Estimating the historic size and current status of the Kemp's ridley sea turtle (*Lepidochelys kempii*) population," *Ecosphere* 7, no. 3 (Mar. 2016): e01244.

¹³ Carr, *So Excellent a Fishe*, 116.

¹⁴ Carr, *So Excellent a Fishe*, 117.

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Chapter Two: One Generation

[Brown]: The riddle of the ridley was solved. But then the scientists faced a more pressing problem. Hildebrand and others went to see the nesting grounds at Rancho Nuevo for themselves in the 1960s. By then, only a remnant remained of the massive arrivals of the past. It was a tragedy that Archie Carr saw too frequently across the Gulf and the Caribbean.

[Archie Carr read by Max McClure]: *“The fabulous conclaves of former years have gone the way of a thousand other sea turtle colonies before them.”*¹⁶

[Brown]: Kemp’s ridley sea turtles almost went extinct after 1947. Commercial harvests and poaching took its toll. There were other causes, too. The Gulf shrimping industry boomed in the postwar era. That meant a growing number of turtles killed by incidental captures in shrimp trawls. And of course there was water pollution and other factors.¹⁷ A new riddle emerged—could humans stop the species from going extinct? The plight of Kemp’s ridleys inspired conservation work, first in Mexico and later in Texas. US efforts focused on Padre Island National Seashore. Dr. Donna Shaver has led the work there for decades. She started as an intern back in 1980 and said she fell in love with South Texas.

[Dr. Donna Shaver]: I was very moved by the plight of the Kemp’s ridley. I had a room in the trailer on the island at the residence area, walked the beaches at night, picked up seashells, learned what they were, and had a copy of action plan for the Kemp’s ridley on the nightstand next to my bed and would read that, became inspired, and the population was plummeting so precipitously that some people thought it might even be too late to try save the species. So, back then, I dedicated my career to trying to help save the Kemp’s ridley turtle that was almost lost in a blink of an eye.

[Brown]: Since then, Dr. Shaver has been a fixture for Kemp’s ridley recovery at the park. And she’s easy to spot, too, with her ranger uniform and long, blonde hair flowing out of her iconic campaign hat. She wears a necklace with two tokens that remind her why she started this work.

[Shaver]: 1947, that’s the year that very famous film was taken...That’s when the population was robust, so that’s our anchor point for the population, 1947. So, I wear, I’ll show you here, it keeps me motivated, here one human generation. Here’s my father’s ring graduation from the Naval Academy, 1947, same year as the film, and here’s my graduation ring from Cornell, 1981. One human generation, we almost lost the species. And there’s a little turtle inside. And so when things get hard, I remember that it was almost lost that quickly.

¹⁵ Cory Gray, “Mystery T.”

¹⁶ Carr, *So Excellent a Fishe*, 157.

¹⁷ Jack Frazier, et al, “Human-Turtle Interactions at Sea,” in *Biology and Conservation of Ridley Sea Turtles*, ed. Pamela T. Plotkin (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 255–257.

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Chapter Three: A New Riddle: How to Save a Species

[Brown]: Kemp's ridley recovery became a race against time. Conservation first started in Mexico in the sixties.¹⁹ That's a whole other story that perhaps we can cover on a future episode. Today, though, I want to focus on what happened north of the border. Here's Dr. Shaver again:

[Shaver]: The program with the turtles here was begun in the mid-1970s by Mr. Robert Whistler, who was a resident of Flour Bluff and a neighbor of Dr. Henry Hildebrand. And they talked about the plight of Kemp's ridleys and other sea turtles, and in the 1974 Resources Management Plan for the park, Robert Whistler put in a statement to form a secondary nesting colony of Kemp's ridley turtles as a safeguard for the species in case some sort of environmental or political catastrophe was to occur in Mexico, there'd be this safe area where Kemp's ridleys could nest and be protected. Well, that morphed into him getting help from the regional chief scientist, bringing in all the other leaders from the sea turtle community worldwide and agency heads that formed this binational action plan. That was the document that was at my bedside in 1980 when I first started....Part of that binational restoration and enhancement program was of course the protection of Rancho Nuevo in Mexico but another part was this effort to form a secondary nesting colony.

[Brown]: And Padre Island National Seashore proved to be a perfect place for this. It protects a long stretch of undeveloped barrier island. Padre Island also historically had nesting Kemp's ridleys.

[Shaver]: It is a re-establishment, and there's some information that they nested in fairly substantial numbers here at one time. But we don't know for sure. This area was a grazing area, it was a bombing range, it's remote, and Kemp's ridleys are very difficult to find nesting. They tend to nest on windy days. Their tracks blow away quickly. These are days where you don't want to be on the beach because you're sand blasted (laughs). Or days where these strong fronts come through, like the very severe weather we can get with tornadoes even, in March and April. Those type of fronts, that's the weather these turtles like before, during, or after, when people wouldn't necessarily have been out on the beach. And even people that are seasoned pros can drive right by a nesting ridley. They're hard to see, the tracks are hard to see. So we don't have good information, but we do know it was a historical nester.

[Brown]: But by the eighties, Kemp's ridleys had almost disappeared. During this time, Dr. Pam Plotkin started her career. She interned with the Student Conservation Association.

¹⁸ Cory Gray, "Mystery T."

¹⁹ See, among others, Selina S. Heppel, Patrick M. Burchfield, and Luis Jaime Peña, "Kemp's Ridley Recovery: How Far Have We Come, and Where Are We Headed?" in *Biology and Conservation of Ridley Sea Turtles*, 325–335.

[Dr. Pamela T. Plotkin]: I was so ecstatic, I had to honestly get a map out to look to see where exactly Padre Island National Seashore (laughs) was because I knew nothing about the Texas coast, and got really excited after I took a look at the map and saw how exciting it looked, just on a piece of paper. And I got a bus ticket sent to me, and I took a bus from New York City to Corpus Christi, Texas in 1982, and got here in May, and fell in love with Texas, with Padre Island National Seashore, with the wildlife that were here at the time, and just with the whole way of life in Texas back then. It was just so different than anything I had ever been exposed to...You know, I was nineteen, twenty, years old at the time, and so through the eyes of somebody that young, this was the wild west. There was no concrete, there were no boardwalks on the beach. There was nothing on the beach. And, you know, North Padre Island didn't have houses, and Schlitterbahn, and hotels, and so, it really was quite different then compared to the way it is now.

[Brown]: As an intern, she worked under Donna Shaver and helped with the experimental Head Start program.

[Plotkin]: The eggs were collected in Mexico, a small percentage of eggs were collected in Mexico, flown to Padre Island National Seashore. They were incubated on Padre Island National Seashore. The hatchlings were allowed to crawl down the beach, and swim out into the water a few feet, and then we would scoop them up and drive them to Galveston, Texas, and they would go into buckets at the NOAA Galveston lab, and the hatchling turtles would grow there for about a year. And then those hatchling turtles, which at the end of the year were about dinner plate size, would be thrown into the Gulf of Mexico. And the idea here was that being exposed to Padre Island National Seashore sand and water, they would remember those cues, potentially chemical cues, and when they became adults, they would return to Padre Island National Seashore to lay their eggs. And by holding onto them for a year, they would grow bigger to a size where there would be fewer predators that would be capable of eating them and killing them. We would, at the end of the year, go and toss those turtles out into the Gulf of Mexico and hope that someday they would come back to Padre Island National Seashore to lay their eggs. So that was my job was to incubate the eggs...It was just such an exciting experience because I had never seen a sea turtle. I had never really thought about marine biology, and the opportunities to study the oceans until that point. And from that point on, I knew that was my calling, and I wanted to be a marine biologist.

[Brown]: Dr. Plotkin has been busy following this path, and currently serves as the director of Texas Sea Grant. The Head Start program, though, was controversial and eventually was discontinued.²⁰ In the mid-eighties, at the lowest point of the Kemp's ridley population, recovery was hard work with little funding. But eventually some of those Head Started turtles came back.

²⁰ See Donna J. Shaver and Thane Wibbels, "Head-Starting the Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle," in *Biology and Conservation of Ridley Sea Turtles*, 297–323.

[Shaver]: We didn't have any money to do the patrols. It was, okay, one day rangers are going to take you down island, one day interpretation, one day maintenance, and it just didn't happen, for the most part. And cast-off military surplus vehicles and, you know, whatever we could use to take use down. So our patrols were very scanty and certainly not adequate to be able to accurately detect nesting. So, what comes first, chicken or egg? You don't go down, you don't find it, you don't get any money because they say, "Well, you don't have any nests so we don't want to give you any money because you don't have any nests." Oh, but if you don't have any money, you can't go down and look and find any nests to prove that you need the money. So it was this circle that was very hard to break until we found our first confirmed returnee from this effort in 1996, a full decade after I began the patrols. It was during that time it was maybe one confirmed nest every two or three years of Kemp's ridley that was found.

[Brown]: Working with endangered species isn't easy. There's constant worries over funding and staffing, it's not that lucrative, and personal sacrifices have to be made. But when Dr. Shaver found that first turtle, she remembers jumping up and down on the beach.

[Shaver]: It was experimental. Nobody knew whether it would work, and here was one right in front of my eyes, opening up all possibilities.

[Brown]: That discovery led to more grants, more funding, and the evolution of the recovery procedures at Padre Island National Seashore. The program has two parts. The first is finding nests and protecting eggs. Since 1997, biologist Cynthia Rubio has played an important role with this aspect.

[Shaver]: And she's brought great things to program, integrating procedures that she learned in Mexico. And I want to stress that our procedures for management are very similar to what has been used in Mexico for decades that worked that helped save the species. Virtually every nest that was found was brought into a protective corral, this big screen enclosure, and planted there so that the poachers wouldn't take it, the predators wouldn't take it, high tides wouldn't take it.

[Brown]: At Padre Island, the eggs are brought to a corral down island or to the incubation facility until they hatch.

[Shaver]: And it protects against predators, and there's all kinds: badgers, skunks, coyotes, raccoons, ghost crabs, fire ants, and then with the hatchlings, the birds too, and we have had hatchlings run over by vehicles. You can't see them.

[Brown]: In the Kemp's ridley recovery efforts, success is measured with every single nest. It's essential because only a tiny percentage of eggs survive to adulthood. But as Dr. Shaver noted before, the nests are hard to find.

[Shaver]: Our patrollers get frustrated because they could drive by, and five minutes later, this couple from Indiana who've never been on the beach before (Brown laughs) finds their turtle.

[Brown]: Over the years, they've adopted a variety of techniques to find eggs. The most interesting, though, has to be how Dr. Shaver trained dogs to sniff out nests.

[Shaver]: And then about fifteen years ago, I trained my little dog Ridley Ranger, he was a Cairn Terrier, and he was in *Bark* magazine, *Family Dog*, all kinds of books, trained him to find nests that were the most difficult to find where we spent hours and hours looking and we couldn't find them. And he did it, and he loved it...And now we got Kempy, K-e-m-p-y, he's only about ten weeks old but he's going to go through training, too.

[Brown]: The pups help find nests and they're also a great public relations tool. And public education is that second part of the recovery program. The most popular events are the hatchling releases held throughout the summer. Even when the releases were closed to visitors during the pandemic, they had almost one million viewers with their Facebook live broadcasts. In previous years, it's been quite the in-person spectacle.

[Shaver]: And we get collectively, for our twenty to twenty-five public releases a year, we get about sixteen thousand people that come out and view them. Grown men literally with tears in their eyes. Many people tell me this is their bucket list item...Little kids run to me in the front row, and it's just a wonderful thing to see, absolutely wonderful. Very rewarding, it's the icing on the cake after all the hard work.

[Brown]: What's curious is that as the Kemp's ridley population slowly recovered, perceptions of sea turtles changed over time. Here's Dr. Pam Plotkin again.

[Plotkin]: Yeah, I don't know how they, when, or how they grew in popularity, but yeah, I mean, you go down the road now and you see people have sea turtle stickers, people have sea turtle tattoos, people have sea turtle shirts, and earrings, and yes sea turtles are cool now. So it's really, it's mind-blowing for me because I'm doing something that's cool now that wasn't very cool back in the 1980s.

[Brown]: And remember that low point of the eighties? Well, by the 1990s and early 2000s, the population started to grow exponentially. The protection of nesting turtles in Mexico and Texas helped. So did the widespread adoption of Turtle Excluder Devices in the shrimping industry. For a while, they were seeing a fair amount of success.

<<musical transition>>²¹

Chapter 4: Continued Threats

[Brown]: I'd like to end there, but I'm sorry to say that the story of Kemp's ridley recovery isn't over yet. New threats have emerged in the 21st century.

²¹ Cory Gray, "Mystery T."

[Shaver]: And now we face climate change, beaches eroding, beach temperatures increasing. Incubation temperature determines the sex of these turtles. Some nesting beaches, they're producing 100 percent female. Well, you cannot sustain a population with a 100 percent female so they are having to manage, where they move nests to cooler areas, they shade, they water nests. Some beaches worldwide, they're reaching lethal temperatures. The eggs are getting too hot and it's killing the developing embryos.

[Brown]: Marine debris is another problem. When Pam Plotkin was in grad school, she studied dead sea turtles that washed up on Mustang Island. Back in the eighties, those sea turtles had eaten fishing line, balloons, and other plastics. When she got the chance to study marine debris again more recently, she jumped at it. This time, the turtles came from the Pacific, from Hawaii. Going through stomach contents of dead turtles, she realized that the plastics problem had escalated.

[Plotkin]: Over 89 percent of those turtles had eaten plastic, and we're not talking about, you know, one little nibble, we're talking entire stomachs filled with things like bottle caps and plastic spoons, and one turtle had a toothbrush in its stomach, and it had bitten a toothbrush in two places so that it was three pieces of the toothbrush in that turtle's stomach. I was pretty shocked when I saw the types of plastic, and the amount of plastic...And about that time, uh, my new graduate student Christine Figgner came and joined my lab, and she was starting research in Costa Rica...and she catches this turtle that had something in its nostril. She thought it was an invertebrate, a barnacle, or something, and she started tugging on it, and realized it was not an animal that was living inside this turtle's nose, it was a plastic straw. She videoed this whole extraction of the plastic straw from the turtle's nose, and when she got done with her fieldwork that day, she called me up and told me that she had taken a video of a sea turtle that had a straw in its nose, and she said it's pretty hard to watch the video, and you can tell the turtle is in pain, and its breathing was compromised, and during the straw extraction, it was also in pain...And so she uploaded that YouTube video, within hours it started getting views, and it turned into a viral video that provided jet fuel for the anti-straw movement that was just beginning in this country to emerge at that time.

[Brown]: You can find that video online, but just to warn you, there's a lot of strong language. Which I think is probably the appropriate reaction for discovering a plastic straw stuck up a sea turtle's nose. Work with Kemp's ridleys can also be heartbreaking. There have been successes and setbacks, particularly after the population dropped in 2010.

[Plotkin]: You know, one of the cool things that I've tried to tell people over the years is that, when you look at that history of the recovery from really the 1970s all the way through today, there have been a lot of things happening in the Gulf of Mexico. During that time, oil platforms increased significantly, and oil and gas development increased significantly. At the same time, that sea turtle was increasing significantly. So, I tell that story so that people understand that, yes, we can develop our natural resources, and do it in a way that doesn't hinder the survival of some of our critically endangered species...But that, there today seems to be a lot of stressors out in the Gulf of Mexico that are impacting the species...And that change in the rate of

increase in the population coincided with 2010, 2011, but it wasn't just the Deepwater Horizon oil spill that occurred at that time, there were a lot of atmospheric and oceanographic conditions that were going on in the Gulf of Mexico that were impacting our resources...Clearly there have been multiple stressors in the Gulf of Mexico and continue to be, from hurricanes, to dead zones, to red tides and other harmful algal blooms, all of those things have an impact either directly or indirectly on the food sources that Kemp's ridleys eat. So, I'm concerned about the future of Kemp's ridley, and that we're not seeing that same trajectory anymore, and I think that everybody's similarly concerned. And it's going to take time, it's going to take another ten or twenty years before we know what impact the Deepwater Horizon really had on that species because it takes at least ten or fifteen years for them to reach sexual maturity and return to beaches to nest. So we still have a ways to go.

[Brown]: That's left scientists celebrating their past successes as they remain concerned for the future.

[Plotkin]: Yeah, so I think I'm cautiously optimistic that the species is going to hold its own for a while, but I think that it's going to continue to take a village, and it's going to continue to take resources, and it's going to continue to take people like Donna Shaver at Padre Island National Seashore who live, eat, and breathe Kemp's ridley sea turtle conservation, to do it.

<<musical transition>>²²

Conclusion

[Brown]: As a historian, I've noticed that a lot of people don't think about time that often. The short blip of time when the massive arribadas dropped down to only several hundred turtles. Or the long sweep of time needed to recover from the short-sightedness of a previous generation. But maybe that's exactly what we need to understand where we fit in this world: a little perspective provided by time. A little more understanding of the past and present, and a lot more thought put into the future. And from my perspective, I see two remarkable women and hundreds of other scientists and volunteers all working together for a single reptile. And that's something to take note of.

<<piano instrumental music fades in²³>>

Thanks for listening everyone. As always, you can read transcripts and listen to oral histories on our website. The Gulf Podcast is made possible by the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. The podcast is written, produced, and narrated by me, Dr. Jen Brown, and my production assistant Max McClure transcribes oral histories and produces his own short pieces. Thanks to Max for playing Archie Car on today's episode. Special thanks to David Todd and the Conservation History Association of Texas for

²² Cory Gray, "Mystery T."

²³ Cory Gray, "Mystery T."

sharing the interview with Dr. Henry Hildebrand. You can check out the Texas Legacy Project at <https://www.texaslegacy.org/>.

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I'm going to leave you today with one final story from Dr. Shaver.

[Brown]: What's been your most memorable experience working with Kemp's ridleys?

[Shaver]: My most memorable experience, I—I got to give you two. The most memorable would be, of course, the first location of first Head Started turtle that I documented nesting on the beach and jumping up and down and being so excited because it was experimental. Nobody knew whether it would work, and here was one right in front of my eyes, opening up all possibilities. And just a couple months ago, I was coming into park and I introduced myself to a ranger that was working the fee station. I said, "Oh, I'm Donna Shaver. I run the turtle program." He said, "I know who you are. I met you in 1996 when you found that first confirmed returnee. You were jumping up and down, you were so excited. You told me all about it." And those two things combined really are important to me because it reminds you that what you're doing can make a difference. You never know when that may be, just an encounter on the beach, of a day that was so important to me, and it influenced his life to come be a park ranger someday.

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Texas Legacy Project, <https://www.texaslegacy.org/>.

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