

VELADOR

Protecting Sea Turtles and their Habitats since 1959

Fall 2002

Costa Rica Urges Florida Leaders to Protect Critical Nearshore Sea Turtle Habitats

Florida hardbottom reef is in threat of being covered during beach renourishment projects.

Courtesy of cryofthewater.org



A recent visit by a Florida green turtle to Tortuguero, Costa Rica, which was documented by CCC researchers, led Costa Rica's Minister of the Environment to ask Florida's governor for help in protecting the marine habitats of these highly migratory species. Costa Rican officials are concerned that nearshore reef habitats used by green turtles could be affected as Florida embarks on a new series of beach nourishment projects along the state's east coast. These hardbottom habitats provide important developmental habitat for green turtles hatched at Tortuguero and other important rookeries in the Caribbean.

Many green turtle hatchlings begin life by emerging from nests on Tortuguero beach. They enter the sea, and, after swimming as long as 24 hours, reach the relative safety of floating sargassum seaweed mats, where they find food and refuge. If lucky enough to dodge their many predators, as well as a host of human threats in the marine environment, they will thrive and grow in the drifting mats for several years before moving into coastal sea grass and reef habitats. These nearshore habitats occur throughout the Caribbean, but research is showing that green turtles are particularly attracted to Florida's east coast.

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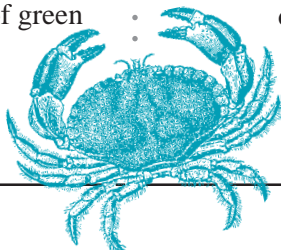
Proposal to Allow Trade in Green Turtles Fails

Schrichie's Underwater Photography



A proposal to legalize the international trade of green turtle products from the Cayman Islands has failed. The United Kingdom/Cayman Island-sponsored proposal, which was considered at a November meeting of the delegates to the Conference on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), would have registered the Cayman Turtle Farm as a legal "captive-breeding" facility under CITES regulations and allowed for the international export of products made from the shell. Caribbean Conservation Corporation (CCC) and other groups opposed the measure because of concern over its negative impacts on wild sea turtle populations and the potential for an increase in illegal trade in green turtles.

The proposal was defeated during a preliminary vote early in the meeting, but was expected to be brought up again. However, the UK environment minister, after being lobbied hard by many environmental organizations and range countries, withdrew the proposal. The decision was based in part on information provided by CITES delegates from Costa Rica that some of the Cayman Island Turtle Farm's stock of green turtles was likely obtained from Costa Rica illegally. Before the proposal could have been approved, the



farm had to prove that all of its turtle stock was obtained with the proper legal authority. For more than four decades CCC has dedicated itself to studying and protecting sea turtles, especially the Caribbean green turtle. In

fact, CCC's creation was spurred by concern over the rapid decline in green turtle populations occurring as a result of unsustainable hunting and egg collection by humans. In the 1970s, CITES banned trade in sea turtle products. The ban eased worldwide pressure on green turtles. These international sanctions, combined with ongoing conservation programs, helped stabilize green turtle populations in many parts of the Caribbean. Recent CCC data show that green turtle nesting at Tortuguero, Costa Rica, has been increasing. Tortuguero hosts the Western Hemisphere's largest remaining nesting colony of green turtles. Similar upward trends have been documented at nesting sites in the U.S.

CCC's Executive Director David Godfrey said that reopening trade in green turtle products would have jeopardized the progress that has been made toward the recovery of green turtles.

"Even though legal trade would be limited to just those turtles raised at the Cayman Turtle Farm, the pressure in developing countries to start illegally harvesting would be too great, especially as international

demand for turtle products is rekindled," said Godfrey.

Many individuals and organizations contributed to the withdrawal of the

UK/Cayman Island proposal.

CCC thanks everyone who wrote letters to delegates. Also, those organizations and individuals who attended the meeting in Chile to voice their opposition deserve much appreciation. Some of the key groups working with CCC on the issue in Chile include: The Ocean Conservancy, International Fund for Animal Welfare, WIDECAST, Species Survival Network, Defenders of Wildlife, and The Humane Society of the United States. CCC especially recognizes Roxana Silman, CCC's Costa Rica Director, who attended the meeting as an official delegate of Costa Rica and was instrumental in solidifying range country opposition to the proposal.

Dead Sea Turtles Wash Ashore in India

By Belinda Wright, Executive Director, Wildlife Protection Society of India

Thousands of sea turtles have stranded this year on the coast of Orissa, India, as a direct result of the lack of enforcement of laws requiring the use of Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) on shrimp trawlers.

From January to March, 2002, over 10,000 dead olive ridley sea turtles washed ashore on the coast of Orissa, India. Although turtle deaths within the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary, located on the Bay of Bengal, are much lower this year, due to diligent patrolling within the Sanctuary, the number of deaths outside the Sanctuary's boundaries has been appalling. According to the Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI), this is entirely due to the lack of enforcement outside the Sanctuary of the law requiring the use of TEDs, which was enacted in December 1997.

In the worst example of the impact of the lack of enforcement, a multi-filament net, with 205 dead turtles attached, washed ashore on the afternoon of February 17th, 2002

VELADOR {bel.a.dor}

In Caribbean cultures, *Velador* translates as "one who stands vigil" — originally referring to turtle and egg harvesters who waited at night for turtles to come ashore. Now CCC claims this title for its newsletter, and in Tortuguero, CCC's researchers and volunteers are replacing poachers as the new veladors.

Velador is published quarterly for members and supporters of the nonprofit **Caribbean Conservation Corporation (CCC)** and its **Sea Turtle Survival League (STSL)** program.

CCC is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the conservation of sea turtles through research, training, advocacy, education and the protection of natural areas.

STSL is the US-based public awareness, advocacy and education program of the CCC.

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at Gandalba beach (*photo at right*). The turtles most likely died about a week before washing ashore. The net showed signs of being cut loose by the boat crew, probably once

it was found full of turtles. When members of the WPSI members reached the site on February 18th, the stench of rotting turtle carcasses was nearly unbearable.

WPSI's sea turtle conservation project, Operation Kachhapa, has provided two sea-going patrol boats to aid in the enforcement of TED regulations. One is operating in the southern part of the Marine Sanctuary, while the other has been patrolling from the mouth of the Devi River. Eighty-four trawlers and gill netters have been seized since December 2001. However, despite the best efforts of the Forest Department, the Coast Guard and WPSI, the turtle slaughter continues. Every day more than 3,000 trawlers continue to fish within the prohibited zone, in violation of the law.

WPSI said that the Orissa State government has consistently failed to protect sea turtles due to the powerful trawler lobby. It was recently discovered that the Orissa Fisheries Department has issued nearly 5,900 mechanical fishing licenses, nearly 5,000 above the license quota of 1,000 set by the State Government in 1984 in a notification under the Orissa Marine Fisheries Act.

A staggering 75,000 sea turtles are documented to have died off the Orissa coast over the last six years. Read more about this issue online at www.kachhapa.org.



Photo by Biswajit Mohanty

HOW YOU CAN HELP:

Please send e-mails and letters to India's Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, with copies to Mr. Naveen Patnaik, Mr. T.R. Balu, and Mr. S.C. Sharma. Ask them to enforce India's regulations and protect the sea turtles found in the country's waters.

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Green Turtle Season Report

By Dr. Emma Harrison, CCC Field Coordinator

The passing of Halloween heralded the end of night patrols for the 2002 green turtle season here in Tortuguero, Costa Rica, an emotional moment as we tagged the last turtle for this year and watched her return to the ocean. During the last 4 ½ months, the 16 research assistants and I have spent over 1900 hours walking the beach each night. And all our efforts have been fully rewarded; we have encountered a total of 2,040 turtles, of which 2,030 were greens, eight were hawksbills and two were late-nesting leatherbacks encountered early on in the season. Our target of 1,000 newly tagged Green turtles was surpassed on the night of September 20th, with Melissa Paxton – a research assistant from the US – being the lucky person to tag the 1000th turtle of the year.

There was an abrupt and early start to this year's nesting season in mid-June which, together with the arrival of the first group of research assistants, coincided with the start of the rainy season. Thus we spent our first two weeks wading around the station, and avoiding the lightning storms out on the beach at night.

Poaching Levels Increase

Unfortunately, at the beginning of the season we also observed quite high levels of poaching, of both adult turtles and eggs. In order to provide Tortuguero National Park personnel with more detailed information we conducted a daily poaching survey for several weeks, which revealed that we were losing around 3.4% of our nests to the poachers. Following this study the park guards increased their beach patrols and together we made a formidable team against would-be poachers. On several occasions when we saw evidence of poaching and radioed the park guards for assistance, they searched the area and subsequently discovered live turtles that were successfully liberated back to the sea. One such incident in October resulted not only in the recovery of two turtles but also in the capture of several poachers.

While most poaching stories have a sad ending, it was not always the case this season. On the 4th of October, two research assistants, Jormmy Machado from Colombia and Arnaldo Redondo from Costa Rica, were checking nests in the morning when they encountered a turtle that had been flipped over and tied up by poachers. She had suffered a deep cut to one of her front flippers and was bleeding quite badly. By a fortunate coincidence Arnaldo is a final year veterinary student, so we carried the turtle back to the station where Arnaldo was able to stitch up her wound. We kept her at the station overnight to monitor her condition (in a specially-made holding box used for our



Sebastian Troëng

satellite turtles) and then early the following morning we carried her back down to the beach and watched as she slowly made her way back to the water and swam out of sight, coming up to the surface twice to breath as we waited. This lucky turtle, who I affectionately nicknamed "Arnolda," wasn't encountered nesting again, but as we were able to tag her good flipper, we will know if she returns in future years.

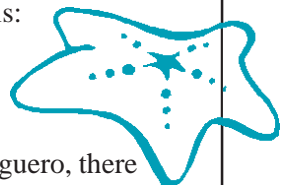
Satellite Migration-Tracking

In late September 2002, a green turtle, "Miss Junie 2," was released with a satellite transmitter. The transmitter had been recovered from the original "Miss Junie," one of eight sea turtles tagged with satellite transmitters and released from Tortuguero, in 2000. Miss Junie and the other turtles became part of the Sea Turtle Migration-Tracking Education Program, and thousands of people in the US and Central America used the Program's website to follow her migration after she left the nesting beach. Tragically, in the fall of 2001 Miss Junie was captured by a turtle fisherman off the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua and killed for her meat. We learned of her death in December and used her story to illustrate to government officials and the public how important international cooperation is to sea turtle conservation efforts.

Fortunately, we were able to recover Miss Junie's satellite transmitter and, after a little reconditioning, attach it to Miss Junie 2. CCC is receiving daily signals from her transmitter. The real Miss Junie, for whom the turtles were named, is a well-loved Tortuguero matriarch. She walked alongside Miss Junie 2 until the turtle safely slid into the sea. Right now Miss Junie 2 is traveling north along the coast of Nicaragua, probably heading for her foraging grounds. CCC is hopeful that she will escape the perils faced by her predecessor and return to Tortuguero to again lay eggs. You can follow her travels on the CCC website. The URL for her tracking map is: www.cccturtle.org/sat_junie2.htm.

Village Lighting Problems Addressed

Even in a small village such as Tortuguero, there are problems with beachfront lighting. Because bright



see Green Turtle Report on page 6

Great Gift Ideas

Use this Gift Adopt-A-Turtle form and Let CCC Handle the Details!

Gift Givers Information:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Daytime Phone: _____

My check is enclosed (*U.S. Only!*)

Please charge my credit card (*Visa or MC only*)

Account number _____ Exp. Date _____

Signature _____

800 678 7853

	Num.	Total
Adopt-A-Turtle! \$25 within the U.S. each.		
Adopt-A-Turtle! \$35 outside the U.S. each.		
TOTAL ENCLOSED		

1. The Gift Adopt-A-Turtle Is For:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Daytime Phone: _____

Name of Turtle: _____

Name as you would like it to appear on Adoption Certificate where it reads "Adopted by" _____

Please send to the Gift Recipient (CCC will mail the Adoption Certificate and materials directly to the Gift Recipient.)

Please send to the Gift Giver (CCC will mail the Adoption Certificate and materials directly to you.)

2. The Gift Adopt-A-Turtle Is For:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Daytime Phone: _____

Name of Turtle: _____

Name as you would like it to appear on Adoption Certificate where it reads "Adopted by" _____

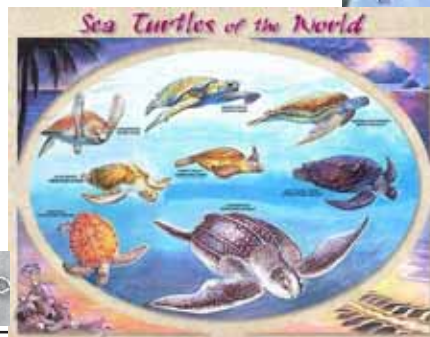
Please send to the Gift Recipient (CCC will mail the Adoption Certificate and materials directly to the Gift Recipient.)

Please send to the Gift Giver (CCC will mail the Adoption Certificate and materials directly to you.)

RETURN TO: Caribbean Conservation Corporation, 4424 NW 13th St. Suite A-1, Gainesville FL 32609



Make Sure to Check Out
CCC's Online Gift
Shop at
www.cccturtle.org



Turtle Report from pg 4


lights behind nesting beaches are known to disturb adults and hatchlings, we have been campaigning for several years to have the lights in Tortuguero covered. In July this problem was reduced through the installation of covers on the village street lights that face the beach. CCC researchers were extremely happy to see them finally arrive and installed. These simple devices have dramatically reduced the amount of light visible on the beach, and we hope the result will be fewer hatchling disorientations.

Every year we encounter turtles with old tags from previous nesting seasons. The tagging project has been running for over 40 years, so we occasionally find tags that are quite old. This year was no exception. We saw five females that were originally tagged over 15 years ago; the oldest of these – with tag number 20696 – was first tagged on the August 21st, 1980, 22 years ago, almost equaling the record set last year by a turtle that had been originally tagged 23 years ago! Possibly most amazing was that the original tag, #20696, was still intact, even after all that time in the ocean. Another old timer who came ashore to nest this year was first seen in 1982; between then and now she has been seen nesting in seven other years; 1984, 1986, 1988, 1990, 1992, 1997 and 2000!

The 2002 nesting season has come to an end in

Tortuguero. But even though we are no longer patrolling the beach at night, our work is not yet finished. We have switched our attention to the nests marked earlier in the season to determine nesting success. Of the 241 marked nests, 55 still have not hatched. We are in peak hatching season, and so most days we see evidence of nest emergences from the previous night. Every morning there are dozens of tiny hatchling tracks crisscrossing down the beach from the depression in the sand that marks the nest location, all the way to the sea. If we are lucky we even get to see this amazing spectacle occurring, something special even for us hardened biologists.

As another green turtle nesting season draws to a close, I look back over the past few months with fond memories of beautiful starlit nights and of turtles emerging from the ocean with the moon reflecting off their wet carapaces as they make their way up the beach to nest. Forgotten are the long hours walking the beach in torrential downpours with thunder booming overhead and the nights when we were eaten alive by the sand fleas that seemed to appear from nowhere the minute you set foot on the beach.

Here's looking forward to an even more successful season in 2003. 

Tag Return from cover


In fact, genetic studies show that a significant proportion of juvenile green turtles found foraging along the east coast of Florida originate from the Tortuguero nesting beach. If the little turtles' luck continues, they survive to reach maturity some 20 to 50 years after hatching and return as adults to Tortuguero to mate and nest on the same beach where they were once born.

During the 2002 green turtle nesting season in Tortuguero, the link between Florida's coastal habitats and the Tortuguero nesting beach was further confirmed by an exciting tag return. On September 30th, 2002, CCC research assistants Cory Matthews (Canada), Dagnia Nolasco (Peru) and Ross Towers (UK) encountered a green turtle attempting to nest. Upon inspecting the turtle for tags, the team discovered a tag bearing number NNY956. Subsequent investigation showed that the turtle was originally tagged on July 14, 1986, about 8 km north of Port Everglades Inlet in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, by researcher Robert Wershoven. When it was originally tagged, the turtle was a juvenile measuring only 46 cm; when spotted in Tortuguero more than 16 years later, it had grown to an impressive size of 103.9 cm.

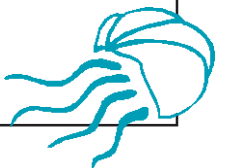
Unfortunately, the nearshore reef habitat in Florida where the turtle was captured and tagged in 1986 may be significantly impacted by a planned beach renourishment project. Beach building projects such as these, which

involve dredging sand from offshore and pumping it onto the beach, impact near-shore habitats, as well as the green turtles that find food and shelter there. In particular, the artificially wide, man-made beaches bury large sections of nearshore reef and hardbottom habitats used by sea turtles and many other forms of marine life. The projects can also increase turbidity in the water, which affects the reef algae – the primary food source for juvenile green turtles.

Upon hearing the interesting news about this tag recovery, Carlos-Manuel Rodriguez, Minister of Environment and Energy of Costa Rica (and an avid supporter of sea turtle conservation), wrote to Florida Gov. Jeb Bush to express concern. In a letter dated October 30th, 2002, Minister Rodriguez appealed to Gov. Bush to “take all possible steps to ensure that our shared sea turtles are adequately considered and safeguarded.” CCC has seen first-hand the efforts and considerable financial commitment that Costa Rican authorities have devoted to sea turtle conservation in Tortuguero.

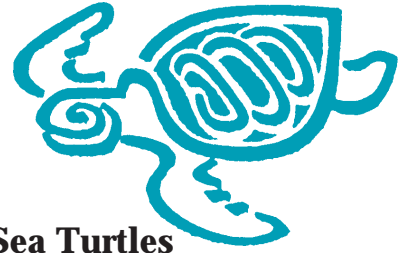
CCC joins Costa Rica in urging Governor Bush and other Florida officials to ensure the protection of critically important Florida nearshore sea turtle habitats when designing and permitting beach renourishment projects and other human activities that negatively affect these shared sea turtle populations. 

**By Sebastian Trøeng
Scientific Director**



Turtle Heroes

A section recognizing sea turtle activists!



Collier County Staff Reduces Impacts of Beach Furniture on Sea Turtles

Beach chairs, sun umbrellas, tents and coolers may all be part of a Florida beach experience, but if left on the beach at night during sea turtle nesting season these items can prevent a sea turtle from laying her eggs or even injure her. For that reason many Florida counties, including Collier County in southwest Florida, require that beach furniture and other equipment be removed from the beach by 9:30 pm from May 1 to Oct. 31. But not everyone abides by the law.

To document and address the problem, Maura Kraus, Principal Environmental Specialist with Collier County Environmental Services Department, recently recorded the type and amount of objects left on Collier County beaches in violation of the ordinance requiring their removal. During the 2001 season, she found 237 beach chairs left out by hotels and motels, 172 beach chairs left in front of private homes, 15 sun umbrellas, 15 tables, eight tents and two coolers. Kraus also recorded several incidents where sea turtles returned to the sea without nesting (false crawls) after the turtles bumped into beach chairs (see photo), boats and garbage cans. Kraus also documented at least ten false crawls caused by turtles running into sea walls.

While people and businesses caught leaving beach furniture and other items on the beach at night get off with a warning for their first violation, a second violation can result in a \$1,000 fine while a third violation can bring as much as a \$5,000 fine. In 2002, Collier County fined one business owner \$500 for leaving out a beach chair that resulted in a false crawl. A beach club was fined \$150 for repeatedly leaving beach chairs on the beach. Many items left on the beach cannot easily be matched to an owner. To address this, Kraus initiated a sticker program to track abandoned beach items. When Kraus or her staff came across a chair or other items whose owner was unknown, they attached a brightly colored, difficult to remove sticker to the item so it could be identified later. If the item was there the next day, it would be removed from the beach.



Photo by Maura Kraus

Two wildlife law enforcement agents with whom CCC has worked on sea turtle issues recently received awards for their work to protect wildlife

Maj. Carmen Castro of the Costa Rican Coast Guard was recognized for her work protecting her country's wildlife, including sea turtles, at a November 8th, 2002, ceremony at the 12th Conference of the Parties of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), held in Santiago, Chile. The Animal Welfare Institute, the Species Survival Network (of which Caribbean Conservation Corporation is a member), and the Monitor Consortium honored Castro for her efforts to stop illegal fishing and hunting of sea turtles, sharks, fish and mollusks and to shut down illegal trafficking in parrots and other birds by sea.


Maj. Castro was nominated for the honor by CCC's Scientific Director Sebastian Troëng, who works with her on sea turtle conservation issues in Costa Rica. CCC's In-country Director Roxana Silman, who accepted the award for Castro because she could not be present at the ceremony, stated that the award is an

acknowledgment of the work done by women worldwide who are committed to improving conservation efforts.

At the same conference, US Fish and Wildlife Service Agent Ed Grace received the prestigious Clark R. Bavin Law Enforcement Award, which recognizes outstanding work in combating wildlife crime. Grace's accomplishments include breaking up smuggling rings dealing in sea turtle eggs, elephant ivory and items made from gorillas, tigers and other endangered species. In 1998, Grace led a sting operation in New York City that netted 12 people who illegally smuggled sea turtle meat and eggs into the US from Costa Rica, Guatemala and El Salvador. The investigation resulted in the confiscation of 764 eggs and about 75 pounds of sea turtle meat. CCC worked closely with Grace to identify the species of animals killed and to determine where in Costa Rica the sea turtle meat might have come from.

CCC congratulates Castro and Grace and commends them for their hard and often dangerous work.

Costa Rica Provides Example for Sea Turtle Protection!


 In early October 2002, Costa Rica passed the Law for Protection, Conservation and Recuperation of Sea Turtle Populations. This new law is an important instrument that significantly strengthens sea turtle protection and declares research into sea turtles and their habitats to be in the public interest. It also states that the Costa Rican Ministry of Environment and Energy is responsible for coordinating the protection of these marine species.

The law determines that a person who kills, hunts, captures, slaughters, traffics in or trades sea turtles will be punished with a prison term. It is also made it illegal to keep sea turtles for commercial purposes, or to trade sea turtle products and sub-products.

In addition, all Costa Rican and foreign shrimping vessels that operate in the territorial waters and exclusive economic zone of Costa Rica are required to use turtle-excluder devices (TEDs).

“We are extremely pleased,” says Roxana Silman, CCC’s Costa Rican Director. “We are very grateful to Costa Rica’s Legislators and Special Commission for showing once again that Costa Rica wishes to assert its global leadership in sea turtle conservation.”

The news of the law has been received with approval in many parts of the country.

“The passing of this law will undoubtedly help us improve protection for the sea turtles that come to nest on our beaches,” says Eduardo Chamorro, Administrator of Tortuguero National Park in northeastern Costa Rica. 



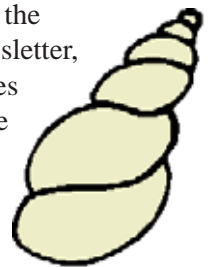
Schrichte's Underwater Photography

CCC salutes these foundations for their recent support of our sea turtle research, conservation and education programs:

Arthur and Elena Court Nature Watch Conservancy
The Lemmon Foundation
Firedoll Foundation
Norcross Wildlife Foundation
Ahimsa Foundation
Dreamcatcher Fund

Thanks for Your Support!

You might have noticed that CCC did not list the names of individuals who recently supported our efforts to save sea turtles. To help reduce the amount of paper CCC uses in the production of this newsletter, CCC will list the names of people who became a member, renewed their membership or made a contribution on our website. To view the names of people who made a donation between September 1st and November 30th, 2002, please visit www.cccturtle.org/member-thanks.htm.



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