



THE INDO-PACIFIC SEA TURTLE CONSERVATION GROUP

September 2007 Newsletter

New Editor for Newsletter

I'm sure all IPSTCG members will join me in warmly welcoming Dr Andrea Phillott, who takes over as newsletter editor, as of this issue.

Andrea has a long-standing interest in sea turtles. Her PhD research at Central Queensland University investigated the fungal invasion of sea turtle nests, and recently she began a study of the dispersal of flatback hatchlings, as reported in the March 2007 newsletter.

Andrea is currently a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the School of Veterinary & Biomedical Sciences at James Cook University, where she is a member of the team studying amphibian diseases.

Although rather too hectic at times, my four years as newsletter editor have been fun and fascinating, and I'd like to say a big thank you to all contributors and committee members. Currently my research project leaves very little spare time but I look forward to keeping in touch and writing occasional articles for future newsletters.

Julia Hazel

Dear Members of IPSTCG,

I have been involved with sea turtle research since an undergraduate student in 1991. I moved to Townsville 2 years ago and am very excited to be involved in the evolution of IPSTCG to Sea Turtle Foundation. Julia has done a wonderful job as Editor of the IPSTCG Newsletter, and I hope to be able to follow her lead in helping keep us all up to date with current news and research.



Andrea Phillott

Progress with Sea Turtle Foundation

Sea Turtle Foundation Limited was officially registered as a company in early September 2007. Exciting progress is being made on a new website that will allow online subscriptions and donations to the group. We hope the website will be live in the coming weeks and we will let members know as soon as it becomes available. The new Sea Turtle Foundation logo is below. As you can see we haven't lost the familiar image of the diving turtle! Renewals for membership of IPSTCG have been allowed to lapse while STF was established but we will soon be contacting everyone to request membership under the STF banner, and continue the work IPSTCG began.



School Donation Assists Sea Turtle Conservation

The Willows State School have kindly donated close to \$200 to assist with sea turtle conservation. Students are involved in fundraising activities for the school, and chose IPSTCG to be the beneficiary after volunteers spoke to them about threats facing local sea turtles. Our thanks go to these students for their fundraising efforts.

CSA on Boat Strike of Turtles

Sea Turtle Foundation, in association with the Burdekin Dry Tropics NRM and Digital Dimensions, have produced a Community Service Announcement describing the effects of boat strike on sea turtles and suggesting ways for boaties to minimise the chance of encountering and hitting a turtle. The announcement will be aired on Channel 7 starting on 13th October. It will also be available to download from our website. This is a wonderful achievement for the group in actively encouraging the community to become involved in sea turtle conservation.

International Sea Turtle Conference in Brisbane 2009

The International Sea Turtle Society will hold the 29th International Symposium on Sea Turtle Conservation and Biology in Brisbane in early 2009. The organising committee are currently seeking sponsors so if any IPSTCG members have industry or corporate connections who may be interested in helping to promote sea turtle conservation, please contact Andrea Phillott (andrea.phillott@jcu.edu.au). At a grass-roots level, the organising committee will also be in need of enthusiastic volunteers to help at the actual conference, so keep a family holiday to Brisbane in mind with an opportunity to meet international sea turtle experts.

New Home for Minty and Torres at Reef HQ

Star attractions at Reef HQ, Minty the albino turtle and friend Torres outgrew their old homes and have been relocated to the large Coral Reef exhibit. Before the move both turtles were given practise swims in the larger tank to allow them to become familiar with the new depths, other animals, and the more natural wave motion in the new environment. Minty and Torres have a specially designed feeding platform that makes sure their feed reaches them and not the fish sharing their tank. Both turtles seem happy and healthy.

Postscript- We were sorry to learn that Minty died unexpectedly after this article was prepared. The cause of death is unknown, however an autopsy will hopefully help discover why the turtle died. Minty was amelanotic- missing the pigment melanin- but this will not have caused poor health. Minty was at Reef HQ for nearly 18 months and will be missed by staff and visitors alike

Minty at 12 months



(Photo courtesy of Reef HQ)

World's Largest Green Turtle Nesting Beach Given Highest Protection Status

Raine Island (off Cape York Peninsula) is the world's largest green turtle rookery and the most significant seabird rookery in the Great Barrier Reef. To protect the animals that use this area for breeding, Raine Island has been given National Park (Scientific) status. The agreement between the Queensland Government and traditional owners limits access to the island to those involved in essential scientific and management activities only.

Unwelcome Turtle Attention!

The turtle breeding season is upon us and at this time of year an adult male turtle's attentions turns to potential mates. Female turtles of the same species are most attractive, but humans involved in ocean activities have sometimes attracted a male turtle's attention. The latest issue of US produced "Marine Turtle Newsletter" describes the sexual harassment of a spear fisherman by an indiscriminate male loggerhead turtle. Anyone familiar with the size and aggressiveness of breeding male turtles will tell you to be wary. Although turtle-human interactions of this kind do not happen very often, they leave the person with a strange story to tell and the turtle frustrated.

Concerns About Powerboat Race

The Australian Offshore Powerboat Club held a race in Cleveland Bay on September 22-23rd. The event was poorly advertised locally, but despite hearing of the event only days beforehand, we immediately voiced concerns to the Australian Offshore Powerboat Club, Maritime Safety Queensland, and Tony Mooney (Mayor of Townsville). Cleveland Bay has shallow waters that are home to turtle, dugong and dolphins. Marine wildlife would have difficulty avoiding boats moving at speeds of up to 250km/hr, and it is almost impossible for drivers to spot and then avoid animals at such speeds. IPSTCG volunteers scanned the local coastline with binoculars during and after the event for affected wildlife but thankfully none were found. Anyone finding a dead or injured turtle, dugong or dolphin can call the EPA Hotline for Marine Wildlife Strandings on 1300 130 372.

Green Turtle with Boat Strike Damage



Photo courtesy of Matthew Godfrey from www.seaturtle.org

Butt-busters!

Staff at GBRMPA gave up their own time on September 4th to remove cigarette butts from Townsville streets and gutters. Their efforts coincided with Threatened Species Week, and they handed out cigarette butt disposal containers to try and minimise further rubbish being washed from gutters into local waterways and the ocean. Some marine animals confuse cigarette butts with food, eat them, and then suffer internal blockages that result in starvation and death.

Education Programme Assisted by Grant

Sara Bell recently successfully applied for a Volunteer Small Equipment Grant. The money will be used to purchase a laptop computer and data-projector to assist in presenting educational material at school talks and community events.

IPSTCG T-shirts for Sale

The last of the IPSTCG t-shirts are now for sale at the bargain price of \$15 each. With our name change to Sea Turtle Foundation, these are about to become collector's items! Please email IPSTCG@beyond.net.au if you would like to purchase a shirt.

December 2007 Newsletter

The next newsletter will include details of our participation in WWF's Marine Turtle Workshop and the inaugural Queensland Coastal Conference.