



## THE INDO-PACIFIC SEA TURTLE CONSERVATION GROUP

### September 2004 Newsletter

## IPSTCG volunteers dig deep!

### The story of the N.E. Herald Island nest excavation trip 2004

By Michael Eastwood

This year's first Coral Sea trip was broken into two groups with Mark Hallam, Susie Glac, Sally Mcphee, Tim Nuenhoffer, Andrew Kaus and myself being the first group to arrive in late March after a bumpy overnight ride onboard the customs vessel "Hervey Bay".

The first group was principally there to dig as many nest sites as possible so as to leave the smaller second group opportunities to do other ongoing research programs on the island and finish off whatever digging was left.

The second group included Tim Harvey and Kerrily Hooper from IPSTCG and the two Dans investigating the insect life on the Islands.

Our first day was taken up with the setting up of the camp, transferring all the gear from the "Hervey Bay" needed onshore and just generally acclimatizing ourselves to our new surroundings. Late that afternoon we excavated a few deep nest sites close to camp to get a feel of what was required and from then on we split into groups of two or three and went about what we were really there for and that was, to dig.


The majority of the 49 nest sites marked from last year's laying season were recovered and they seemed to hold a very healthy percentage of hatched egg cases, which was great to find. More specifically, 3596 eggs were found resulting in a hatchling success rate of 84%.

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One of the green turtle hatchlings that emerged while IPSTCG volunteers worked at NE Herald Island, held by Susie Glac. M Hallam photo

**Diary Dates**



**September 8, 1-2pm: "Turtles in Trouble"** seminar by Tim Harvey at James Cook University, TESAG building, Room TG124, all welcome

**October: Local monitoring of turtle nesting** will resume during the second half of October. Please plan to keep some Friday or Saturday nights free to assist!

**November-December:** IPSTCG volunteers will again have the opportunity to assist with turtle nesting surveys on islands of the Coringa-Herald National Nature Reserve in the Coral Sea – watch for email notices.

## **Nest Excavation Trip** *continued from page 1*

We were even lucky enough to have somewhere between 50 - 60 turtle hatchlings shuffle into the camp over a few nights.

These little fellows were all carefully scooped up then examined, weighed, measured and photographed.

The hatchlings were finally sent on their way towards the tidal zone to hopefully make it through the waves and the predators.

During the hotter hours of the day we would take a break from the shovel work and either snorkel amongst the coral counting beche-de-mer, Trochus shells and whatever else we could see. Walking in the shade of the trees growing on the island or a cooling swim in the shallows in the crystal clear waters surrounding us was another good option.

Other ongoing projects on this trip were the replacing of temperature data loggers, seabird counts, rubbish collecting and analysis from two islands plus the scale insect management systems which are being put into place.

I know we all had a great time on that lovely little island and would like to thank IPSTCG, everyone aboard the "Hervey Bay" who do a super job and of course Mark Hallam. One of the very best things about all of this is we're all hopefully involved in something benefiting the animals living out there, which ultimately makes it a greater experience for everyone and everything concerned.



Post-hatching nest excavation requires a lot of digging! Kerrily Hooper shovels sand while Tim Harvey takes a break M Hallam photo

## **Apologies for late newsletter**

My apologies to all who have been wondering when the next IPSTCG newsletter would appear. The reason for the delay has been a severe shortage of spare time while I was away in Moreton Bay starting my research project – more about this on page 4.

*Julia Hazel, Newsletter Editor*

## **Local events and awareness raising projects**

June was a particularly busy time for the small group of dedicated volunteers who set up the IPSTCG stall at Ecofiesta in early June, and at the Thuringowa River Festival at the end of the month.

Ecofiesta attracted the crowds as in previous years and our stall received lots of attention and sold plenty of T-shirts. The River Festival was also successful despite being blasted by exceptionally strong winds this year.

IPSTCG's new project officer, Carryn Manicom, is currently coordinating a project to raise awareness about the need for sea turtle conservation.

The project involves students at Townsville and Thuringowa schools who, supported by local artists, are producing art works inspired by the theme "Turtles in Trouble".

Their creative work will be on public display at Perc Tucker Gallery and Pinnacles Gallery during November and selected works will be featured in a calendar.

## **Remote area first aid course**

IPSTCG intends to arrange for a group of keen volunteers to do a St Johns Ambulance training course in first aid for remote areas. This training will be particularly appropriate for those who participate in turtle monitoring and research projects far from urban support services, including IPSTCG's annual Coral Sea trips.

A pre-requisite is current senior first aid certificate. The course runs for one full day and cost is expected to be \$120. If interested in attending this course please contact Deb Bower as soon as possible:  
[deborah.bower@jcu.edu.au](mailto:deborah.bower@jcu.edu.au)

# Turtles and dugongs honoured by new artworks on Townsville Strand



Two remarkable sculptures by artist Adrian John Davis were recently installed along Townsville's Strand, thanks to a project co-ordinated by Perc Tucker Regional Gallery and Townsville City Council.

The green turtle sculpture (picture above) is slightly larger than life size and attracts a lot of attention from people walking along the southern part of the Strand walkway. (It's near the enclosed play area for children.)

The dugong sculpture, slightly smaller than life size, has been installed further north, near the fishing jetty.

An interpretive panel, which provides concise information about the species and its significance, accompanies each work of art.

Each panel includes a checklist of things people can do to help these two threatened species.

The list for turtles is reproduced at the right.

Please help to protect sea turtles by:

- Never throwing plastic bags, cigarette butts, fishing line or other rubbish into the sea or onto the beach
- Reducing speed when boating in areas frequented by turtles
- Refusing to buy sea turtle products - tortoise-shell jewellery, souvenirs, meat and eggs
- Not disturbing nesting sea turtles
- Reporting dead or injured turtles to the Marine Animal Hotline on 1300 360 898



## Current research at James Cook University relevant to turtle conservation management

Research projects currently under way at James Cook University aim to contribute directly to turtle conservation management.

Mariana Fuentes recently completed the fieldwork for her Honours project. Her aim was to investigate the possible diet selectivity of juvenile green turtles and their distribution at Green Island, offshore from Cairns.



Mariana collected 85 lavage samples from 73 juvenile turtles out of a total of 113 turtles that were caught by the rodeo method (photo above). She is currently busy on her assessment of diet selectivity, and has already established that:

- Turtles focused their diet on either seagrass or algae, with no turtles consuming equal quantities of algae and seagrass
- Seagrass was the most frequently consumed food by juvenile turtles, being the major food item (60%-100% of seagrass consumption) consumed by 82% of the juvenile turtles, and representing 81% of all the food consumed by the turtles sampled.

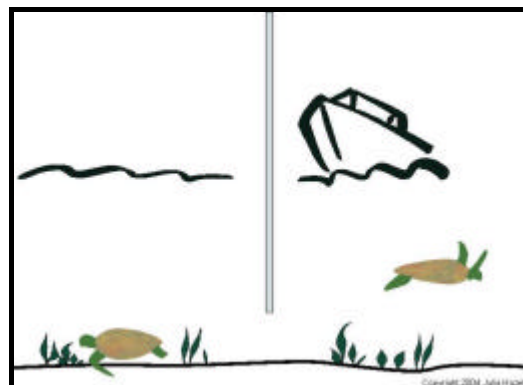
- Algae represented 15% of all the food consumed by juvenile turtles, being the major food item (60%-100% of algae consumption) for 18% of the juvenile turtles sampled.

Julia Hazel (aka IPSTCG newsletter editor) has begun a project that will focus on the problem of vessel strikes on turtles and recently started her fieldwork in Moreton Bay

This large embayment in southern Queensland is a vital foraging area for green turtles and loggerheads as well as other many other marine animals. However, Moreton Bay hosts the ever-growing city of Brisbane on its western shore and some parts of the bay experience heavy commercial and recreational boat traffic.

It is therefore not surprising that the majority of turtle deaths ascribed to vessel collisions have been recorded in the Moreton Bay area, according to stranding records maintained by Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. However runners up in this unfortunate death toll are Hervey Bay and IPSTCG's own "front yard", Cleveland Bay. Both areas may be also included in later phases of this research project.

The first part of the study will involve direct visual observation and video recording of turtle responses to vessels travelling at slow, moderate and fast speeds. Later stages of this research will involve detailed tracking of turtle movements in the vicinity of navigation channels.



Other JCU projects relevant to turtle conservation are still in the early planning stages. Further details will be included in a future newsletter.