



THE INDO-PACIFIC SEA TURTLE CONSERVATION GROUP

September 2005 Newsletter

Local schools focus on saving sea turtles

Students at St Joseph's School at The Strand recently devoted a full day to sea turtles, with films, games, artwork, debates and a lively IPSTCG presentation.

A few days later at Belgian Gardens State School, turtles were the subject of a student-run video interview with IPSTCG president Tim Harvey.

These were just the two latest events in a busy series of IPSTCG turtle talks and visual presentations at local schools (see page 4) designed to raise awareness about sea turtles and complement existing environmental education programs.

Students and teachers have responded to IPSTCG's initiatives with great enthusiasm and energy and many have gone on to devise their own creative ways to promote sea turtle conservation.

After learning about the risk that drifting plastic bags can pose for sea turtles, one class at The Willows State School last year decided to investigate the number of plastic bags that people used. Within four weeks these year three students had collected over 11,000 plastic bags from a school of 1000 students.

The students assembled the plastic bags in an enormous chain more than 4 kilometres in length, and then invited their entire school and local community to see the result. The chain of bags encircled the school oval several times, while further chains of bags in the middle were used to spell out the words "Save our sea turtles". The event attracted media coverage from newspapers, radio and television stations, and the students' message reached a very wide audience.

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Membership renewal... ...do it now!

IPSTCG membership falls due on June 1 each year. If you have not yet renewed your membership, please do so now - IPSTCG needs your support. Prompt payment will also save you money. Membership fees will increase from November 1 but the old rates listed below apply until 30 October 2005.

Individual - \$22

Student - \$15

Family/Group - \$38.50

You can print a membership form at:
www.aims.gov.au/ipstcg/ipstcg-02-1.html

Or simply post your cheque or money order with your name and address, to IPSTCG, PO Box 1190, Townsville, Qld 4810.

New email address

IPSTCG@beyond.net.au



A preserved turtle hatchling from IPSTCG's education kit provided 'hands-on' learning experiences for the students at St Josephs School
Tim Harvey photo

Local schools focus on turtles

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Following on from that outstanding achievement, Willows students researched and wrote scientific reports on turtles and held an 'Environmental Education Expo' to highlight ways that humans are affecting turtles' chances of survival. They also designed and made their own "turtle bags" to promote safer alternatives to plastic bags, and then sold over 400 of these calico bags to the community with the intention of donating their profits to IPSTCG.



Photo above courtesy of The Willows State School web site (<http://thewilloss.eq.edu.au>) taken when students displayed the 4km-long chain of plastic bags they collected over 4 weeks. Message in the centre of the oval: reads "Save our sea turtles!"

Turtle info on display

Townsville's Eco-fiesta on June 5 provided a fun and informative day out with a strong environmental message. IPSTCG's stall attracted plenty of attention from people interested in turtles and IPSTCG T-shirts sold well.

Another successful event was the Thuringowa River Festival on August 28. However hasty improvisation was needed when IPSTCG volunteers were confronted by missing display materials.

To ensure things run smoothly in future the IPSTCG committee plans to develop an events kit that can be easily transported and set up at various venues. Help from anyone with creative ideas for new displays will be most welcome – please send a quick email to IPSTCG@beyond.net.au if you are able to help.



Students at St Josephs School displayed colourful and creative artworks that drew attention to the dangers that drifting garbage and fishing trawlers can pose for sea turtles

Tim Harvey photo

Call for volunteers to help with local turtle monitoring

IPSTCG needs volunteers to help monitor turtle nesting during November at the "AIMS beach" at Cape Ferguson.

There's an urgent need for a few people with prior monitoring experience and ability to commit to four nights over a two-week period, to lead groups of less experienced assistants.

For the upcoming turtle nesting season IPSTCG will adopt a new "intensive" monitoring schedule during the November peak nesting period. This is expected to support more effective comparison of data collected by various community groups that monitor turtle nesting in Queensland.

If you can help, please send an email to IPSTCG@beyond.net.au



IPSTCG volunteers measure a nesting turtle during a local monitoring session
IPSTCG photo

Coral Sea turtles pose challenges for data management and future monitoring

IPSTCG has taken on the task of collating data accumulated over 13 years of monitoring turtle nesting at islands in the Coringa-Herald National Nature Reserve in the Coral Sea. The outcome will be a comprehensive report to Federal authorities on monitoring results.

Standardising the data has been challenging due to the diverse approaches to data management that were used by various agencies and individuals involved in Coral Sea turtle monitoring since the program began in 1991.

Over the past five years IPSTCG volunteers have conducted annual monitoring on these remote islands but regrettably the 2004 trip had to be cancelled due to changes in government policy.

Plans for 2005 Coral Sea monitoring are still hanging in the balance. Committee members remain optimistic that logistical and budget difficulties may be resolved soon and members will be notified by email as soon as possible.



Coral Sea monitoring – a normal night's work for IPSTCG volunteers included measuring the many female green turtles that nest on North East Herald Island.

Mark Hallam photo



The monitoring team at Ingram Island lifts a hawkbill turtle from the catch boat. The turtle will be carried ashore for measurement and laparoscopy, and then released on the reef where it was caught.

Tim Harvey photo

Successful winter monitoring of hawksbills and green turtles at the Howick Group

During July and August Ian Bell conducted another turtle monitoring session at the Howick group of islands off the east coast of Cape York peninsula.

Two Earthwatch teams and additional volunteers from the Hopevale community, QPWS, IPSTCG and Tubbataha Reef National Marine Park in the Philippines shared the base camp at Ingram Island and contributed to the success of this project.

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Volunteers from the Philippines prepare a turtle for laparoscopy at Ingram Island during the winter monitoring session at the Howick Group

Tim Harvey photo

Howick Group hawksbills and greens

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Blustery winds and choppy seas did not deter the turtle spotters and turtle catchers and they achieved record numbers: a total of 102 hawksbills and 304 green turtles. All turtles were measured and tagged, and all hawksbills also underwent laparoscopy to confirm their reproductive status.

A number of turtles were recaptures of turtles that had been tagged previously, either while foraging in the Howick Group or at distant nesting beaches. Therefore when the data have been collated and analysed this work is likely to offer new insights into the Howick turtles' site fidelity, migratory behaviour and reproductive cycles and support enhanced conservation management in the future.



An Earthwatch volunteer holds a green turtle and a hawksbill to demonstrate the differences between the two species. Both were tagged, measured and released during the 2005 monitoring session at the Howick Group

Tim Harvey photo

Talking turtles – IPSTCG involvement in community awareness and education

Since the group's inception, one of IPSTCG's primary objectives has been to "design and deliver education programs to promote community awareness of the threats to sea turtle populations and inspire proactive solutions to diminish those threats".

A small number of dedicated IPSTCG volunteers have contributed a lot of their time and energy to prepare displays, organise events, present talks and run workshops.

In the blur of activity no one recorded details over the group's early years but a partial list (see below) and the wonderful responses from local schools (see page 1) confirm that IPSTCG people are regularly getting out in the community and "talking turtles".

IPSTCG community activities 2004-2005

- * CRC Reef Megafauna Workshop - talk on behalf of IPSTCG to stakeholders
- * Townsville Ecofiesta 2004
- * Thuringowa River Festival 2004
- * Townsville City Council Creek to Coral initiative, name the Strand turtle statue
- * ABC Interview - IPSTCG involvement in QPWS/Earthwatch Hawksbill Project
- * CRC Sustainable Tourism - talk to 39 PhD students - Strand
- * Education Queensland 'Under the Sea' Web Chat room event
- * Willows State School talk 2004
- * Turtle Calendar Artists talk
- * Northern Beaches School talk
- * Garbutt State School talk
- * Talk at JCU - TESAG Seminar Series
- * Magnetic Island Monitoring Workshop
- * Northern Beaches Monitoring Workshop
- * Water Usage Forum for Waters around Magnetic Island - MI Community Development Association
- * Launch of Turtle Calendar for 2005
- * ABC Radio Interview - Turtles in Trouble
- * WIN TV Interview - Turtles in Trouble
- * Exhibition - Turtles in Trouble - Perc Tucker Gallery
- * Exhibition - Turtles in Trouble - Pinnacles Gallery
- * Reef HQ - Talk
- * March Talk at St Joseph's Catholic School
- * Two talks at Willows State School 2005
- * Townsville Ecofiesta 2005
- * Eco day exhibition at Willows State School
- * Thuringowa River Festival 2005
- * September Talk at St Joseph's Catholic School
- * Video interview - Belgian Gardens State School pupil project
- * NQCC Conservation Conference talk and exhibition