



THE INDO-PACIFIC SEA TURTLE CONSERVATION GROUP NEWSLETTER

June/July 2002

The last 2 months have been hectic. The visit by the tall ship '*Windeward Bound*' enabled us to organize a talk for the crew and to initiate an incidental turtle monitoring project. The '*Windeward Bound*' is recreating the historic circumnavigation of Australia by Matthew Flinders, and will be journeying along the tropical Australian coast for several months. The crew have agreed to report any sightings of turtles during this time which we will enter onto our database.

We held the second of bi-monthly talks at JCU on 8th May. A big thanks to Nick Wynn for his talk about our Coral Sea project, which caused considerable interest. Our stall at Ecofiesta, on June 2nd was well attended and we got over 150 signatures on our petition to the Queensland Government about a turtle rehabilitation plan. We had several new items on display for the first time. Our new brochure on threats to sea turtles in the Townsville region was well received and our stickers were a great success. The IPSTCG hats, which we only received the day before, sold out completely! May I say a big 'Thank You' to all the volunteers who helped make the Ecofiesta stall such a success. It was great to see some of the younger members on the stall. It is important to stress that IPSTCG is very much a 'hands-on' organization and the more people get involved the greater our influence will be. You can be involved in all aspects of our work, from the Coral Sea project to distributing leaflets. It is not always glamorous work but it all helps.

Some reasons to celebrate. We were successful in getting a Thuringowa Community Grant and winning a Townsville City Council Environment 2002 Award. I would like to thank everybody who put in the time and effort to make these possible, especially Shelley, Cassie, Neil, Ian and Sara. We have recently submitted an application for an Envirofund Grant to enable us to start several new initiatives and expand our monitoring and education program during the 2003/4 nesting season. We are keeping our fingers crossed.

We continue to be active in lobbying on behalf of sea turtles. We will be actively voicing our concerns and comments over the new Representative Areas Program (RAPs) proposed for the GBR. Ann Ferguson (WWF) has an article on RAPs in this issue of the newsletter and we would actively encourage all IPSTCG members to state their position concerning this initiative.

Finally, in the last newsletter I forgot to say thanks to the members who volunteered to help on Clean up Australia Day. Sorry for the omission. THANK YOU!

Tim Harvey (President)

In this issue:

- Protection of the GBR for Marine Turtles (the RAP issue) – by Ann Ferguson
 - The Leatherback Turtle – by Neil Mattocks
 - World Watch turtle news and Local issues and Activities
-
-

Marine sanctuaries can benefit the GBR and Marine Turtles– make sure you have your say – By Ann Ferguson (WWF)

If you love marine turtles and have a passion for the marine environment, then it's time for you to have your say in protecting the Great Barrier Reef. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority is re-zoning the reef to increase marine sanctuaries (also known as Green Zones or 'no-take' areas) to protect the immense diversity of marine life occurring in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Activities such as diving, snorkeling and sailing are allowed in marine sanctuaries but extractive activities such as fishing and collecting are excluded.

Currently, only 4.6% (about 16 000km² out of a total of 347,800km²) of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is protected as marine sanctuaries. If you thought far more of the Marine Park was protected from fishing, then you're not alone. Surveys conducted by the CRC Reef Research Centre show that most tourists believe that the Great Barrier Reef should be protected because of its unique natural environmentⁱ. Surprisingly, the surveys reveal that at least half the tourists to the Great Barrier Reef believe that commercial fishing is NOT ALLOWED in the World Heritage areaⁱⁱ.

GBRMPA is now calling for the general public to make submissions to the plans to increase these areas. You can get a copy of the submission form by calling 1800 990 177 or you can make an electronic submission via the web at www.gbrmpa.gov.au (click on 'hot issues' and go to Representative Areas Program). The submission period closes on August 7.

WWF strongly encourages you to make a submission to the program in support of a significant increase in the protected areas and that these new areas should specifically include marine turtle habitat and migratory pathways. We also encourage you to contact your local Federal politician to let them know of your support for a comprehensive network of marine sanctuaries throughout the Marine Park. This is a unique opportunity for you to have a say in a program that may help increase protection for marine turtles and their habitat in the Great Barrier Reef.

Ann Ferguson
Community Liaison Officer
Great Barrier Reef Campaign
World Wide Fund for Nature
www.gbr.wwf.org.au

ⁱ D.Green, G.Moscardo, T.Greenwood, P.Pearce, M.Arthur, A.Clark, B.Woods, *Understanding Public Perceptions of the Great Barrier Reef and its Management*. CRC Reef Research Technical Report No 29. CRC Reef Research Centre, 1999, p. 34.

ⁱⁱ D. Green, p.34



Mariana and Shelley excavating a Green Turtle nest in the Coringa-Herald National Nature Reserve in the Coral Sea during our visit in March 2002. A full report on the data collected from the last nesting season, both in the Coral Sea and locally, will be in the next issue of this newsletter.

The Leatherback - By Neil Mattocks

Sometimes when talking about another animal species it is better to leave dry biological statistics and descriptions behind. The leatherback sea turtle is one such animal, a creature that modern myths may soon develop around, an animal to be described in much the same way we talk of the Tasmanian Tiger or the Passenger Pigeon today. Why might this happen? Because this most awesome of the reptiles left on the planet today, a survivor of many millions of years of evolutionary processes, is going extinct. Fast!



Eben Mattocks (one of our younger IPSTCG members) watching a leatherback hatchling released from a nest where it had become trapped (Culebra Island, Puerto Rico)

With almost no nesting sites for the Leatherback in Australia there would be few IPSTCG members that have been fortunate enough to have seen one. Pelagic in nature, the tropical, sub-tropical and even temperate waters of the world are its home, and encounters at sea are relatively rare. It is only when the adult females venture onto steep tropical beaches to lay their eggs that they can be easily viewed.

A sleek black body and enormous and powerful flippers emerge from the foam as the egg-laden female, weighing in excess of 350kg, pulls herself up the beach. Her deliberate and measured movements seem to show the dignity that such an ancient lineage deserves. The last of the dinosaurs she always seemed to me, as I sat and watched.

Population declines in the 20th century were dramatic and latest figures on leatherback populations show no reason to believe that this is changing. The impacts of humans, our long-lines, set nets, ghost nets, trawl nets, marine pollution, egg harvest, adult harvest and habitat destruction have now all but pushed this incredible animal to the point of no return.

Today, it is still possible to sit on a quiet beach somewhere in the tropical world and witness a leatherback come up the beach to lay her eggs just as her forbears have for 65 million years. Perhaps your children will only see the empty beach.

This surely says much about humans and the need for them to rethink their place in eternity.

In Costa Rica they take protection from poaching of remaining nesting females very seriously



Volunteers Wanted

Ian Bell at Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service is looking for volunteers to help catch and tag sea turtles in Cleveland Bay. Due to weather conditions Ian often does not know whether he will be going out until the last minute. If you would like to help and can be available at the drop of a hat please contact us at IPSTCG@beyond.net.au and we will put you in touch with Ian. Ian will be our next speaker on 14th August, so come and meet him!

World Watch Turtle News by Sara Townsend

CUBAN PROPOSAL TO DOWNLIST HAWKSBILLS - For the third time in a row Cuba has presented to CITES a proposal to downlist the hawksbill sea turtle to sell 7.9 tons of shell to Japan at the next COP in Chile this November. The Cuban proposal was defeated in 1997 in Zimbabwe and in 2000 in Kenya. It can be defeated again in Chile if you act now. The complete Cuban proposal can be downloaded at: <http://www.cites.org/common/cop/12/prop/eng/E12-P30.pdf>. Cuban authorities are also sending the full proposal to range states around the Caribbean. Please contact: Wildlife Protection, Environment Australia, G.P.O. Box 787, CANBERRA, ACT 2601 (Email: wps@ea.gov.au) and ask them to oppose this proposal and exhort Cuba to withdraw it. **Source: Juan Carlos Cantú - Greenpeace México**

EMERGENCY RULES ON TEDS - The National Marine Fisheries Service requests that shrimpers trawling in south Atlantic waters use turtle excluder devices (TEDs) that are modified to have an opening large enough for leatherbacks to escape. This will protect migrating endangered leatherback sea turtles. Emergency restrictions requiring modified TEDs in all inshore waters and certain offshore waters are often put in place during the sea turtle breeding season but once expired are difficult to reinstate due to administrative restrictions. It is clear that leatherbacks continue to use these waters long after the expiry of emergency TED rules, as extremely high levels of strandings of various sea turtle species, including leatherback sea turtles, have occurred along the Georgia coast during this time. NOAA Fisheries is currently considering emergency action in the area to protect sea turtles and is therefore urging shrimpers in the South Atlantic to comply with this request. Use of the larger-opening TEDs will protect leatherback sea turtles and save shrimpers the trouble of having to reinstall the larger TEDs within the next few weeks, when additional emergency rules are likely to be enacted. **Source: Chris Smith, Public Affairs Officer. National Marine Fisheries Service. Florida USA**

Locally.....

Websites – One of our members, Eric Strom, has been developing a website for us. It looks very professional and, once we have it on a server somewhere, should significantly help to raise our profile and show the risks to sea turtles in Australian waters. The trial site can be viewed at: <http://dunk.cs.jcu.edu.au/~jc127107> (you will need to use Internet Explorer). We have also been given some server space at the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS), and they have put our details on the web too! See: <http://www.aims.gov.au/ipstcg>.

Ecofiesta – Thanks to the members that turned out to help us at Ecofiesta. It was a very successful event. We managed to distribute lots of our new IPSTCG pamphlets, and give out stickers to kids. We took part in the children's events too by inviting them to help paint a "Kids 4 Turtle Conservation" banner.

Environmental Excellence Award – IPSTCG was presented with a certificate and \$1000 cheque for its "Community Group" entry in the Townsville City Councils 2002 Environment Awards. Well done to Shelley and Neil for getting the papier-mache turtle organized.

Next IPSTCG Talk – Due to the mid year break at James Cook University, there will be no talk in July. The next IPSTCG talk will be at 6.30pm on Wednesday 14th August in the TESAG Seminar room TG124, at James Cook University. Ian Bell will be speaking on Turtle Research Methods, which should be fascinating given his many years of experience in this field.