

INTER-AMERICAN CONVENTION FOR THE PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION OF SEA TURTLES (IAC)



NEWS BULLETIN

No.38

January-April 2020

Photo by [Ralph Olazo](#) on [Unsplash](#)



Monitoring of Green Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) nesting in IAC Index Beaches at Santa Cruz and Isabela Islands (Galapagos Archipelago)

Source:

Guardaparques y voluntarios monitorean la anidación de las tortugas marinas

Directorate of the Galapagos National Park

<https://bit.ly/AnidaciónPNG>

Rangers from Galapagos National Park, and local, national, and foreign volunteers moved into Isabela and Santa Cruz Islands to begin the monitoring of the green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) nesting season 2020, a species in risk of extinction.

Monitoring began in 2000 by the Charles Darwin Foundation. In 2010, monitoring responsibilities passed to the hands of the Archipelago environmental authority that continued monitoring the populations, according to Ecuador's delegate to the IAC Scientific Committee, the Biologist Eduardo Espinoza.

Seven volunteers were trained for a week on monitoring protocols and technique, safety and behavior regulations in protected areas, and attention to sea turtles. This year sea turtle camps were opened in Quinta Playa (Isabela) and Las Bachas (Santa Cruz) and would remain operating until the end of April when nesting and hatching peaks end.

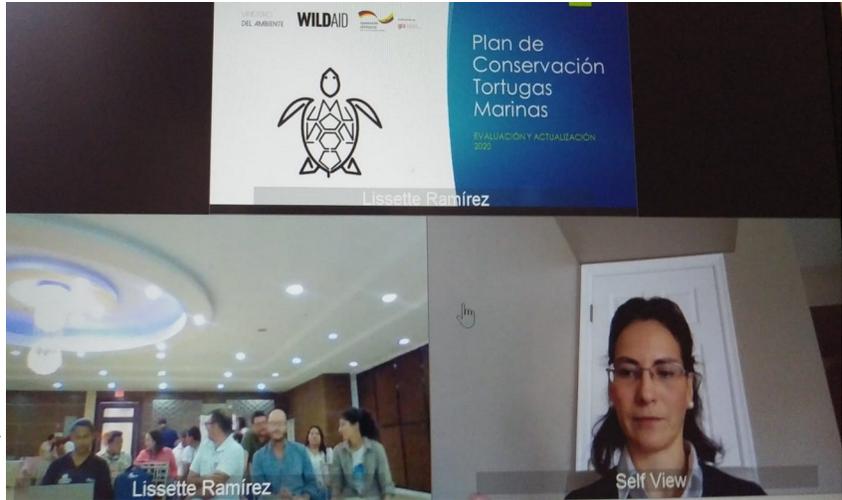
These beaches have been listed as index beaches of the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC), given their importance as areas for the conservation of the species and considering that Galapagos is the world's second most important site for green turtle nesting, after Michoacan, Mexico.



Photo from www.galapagos.gob.ec © Galapagos National Park, Ecuador.

The IAC Attended a Workshop to Assess and Update Ecuador's National Sea Turtle Conservation Plan

The IAC Secretary *Pro Tempore* of the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea turtles -IAC- Ms. Veronica Caceres, attended the workshop to Assess and Update Ecuador's National Sea Turtle Conservation Plan, held on February 21 – 22, 2020 in Salinas, Ecuador with the support of Germany Technical Cooperation GIZ, WildAid, and Ecuador's Ministry of Environment in Salinas.



The objective of the workshop was to bring together sea turtle specialists from governmental sectors, decentralized autonomous governments, the academy, and NGOs, to present the plan progress on implementation and update the guidelines for the following 10 years. The 40 participants of the workshop included representatives from the Marine and Coastal Management Undersecretary in charge of leading and implementing the plan; the Marine Protected Areas, including Galapagos National Park; the Fisheries Authority, the Fisheries National Institute, Universities, Non-

Governmental Organizations, and Cantonales Autonomous Government. The IAC Secretary participated via videoconference.

The experts analyzed sea turtle conservation activities carried out during the last four years by Ecuador's government, Universities, community governments, and NGOs to implement the 5 objectives of the action plan 2014, which are: 1. To protect nesting, reproduction, and foraging areas, 2. To reduce the impact of interactions with fisheries, 3. To involve citizens in sea turtle protection, 4. To produce priority



information for sea turtle conservation decision making, and 5. To actively contribute to international efforts for sea turtle protection.

During this workshop, there was a plenary to identify conservation activities that were not included or had low implementation as well as those that need to be enhanced. Also, a SWOT analysis allowed identifying the challenges and progress of sea turtle conservation in Ecuador. The IAC invited Ecuador to include regional conservation actions reflected in Ecuador’s participation at the IAC Consultative and Scientific Committees, such as records of bycatch in artisanal fisheries, and trafficking of hawksbill products (i.e. fighting cocks spurs) in the updated document.

The two-days meeting met the goals of reviewing the implementation of Ecuador’s sea turtles action plan and updating the objectives and corresponding activities according to the current needs to enhance sea turtle conservation actions contributing to the regional recovery of the species protected by the IAC.

Photos: IAC Secretary *PT* attending the videoconference and group photo by © Lissette Ramirez—Ecuador’s Ministry of Environment

Second Meeting for the IAC Outreach to Canada, Guianas (French Guiana, Guyana, And Suriname) and Trinidad & Tobago

The second coordination meeting to strengthen outreach to Canada, French Guiana, Guyana, Suriname, and Trinidad & Tobago towards the ratification of the IAC by these countries was held via videoconference on February 26, 2020. The meeting involved the participation of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) representatives from Suriname, Guyana, the Netherlands, and Canada, as well as from the Sealife Law Centre and Dalhousie University representative from the same country.

The objective of the meeting was to follow up on the agreements established during the first meeting on November 2019, which included identifying key contacts in the countries governmental agencies and prepare material to present the information regarding the importance of joining the IAC for the conservation of all sea turtles species in the region, with a focus on the Northwest Atlantic Leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*). The team continues working on implementing the strategies discussed keeping contact with the Secretariat *Pro Tempore*.



Photo: Michael Hiwat (WWF-Guianas), Monique van de Water (WWF Netherlands), Olga Koubrak - Sealife Law Centre/Dalhousie University, Luz H. Rodriguez and Veronica Caceres (IAC Secretary *Pro Tempore*).

IAC Secretary *Pro Tempore* Meeting with Trinidad & Tobago’s Environmental Management Authority (EMA)

Within the framework of the IAC Resolution for the Conservation of the Northwest Atlantic Leatherback ([CIT-COP9-2019-R2](#)) requesting to approach countries that are no-members of the IAC, and with the collaboration of Trinidad & Tobago’s Environmental Management Authority (EMA) Chair of the Board of Directors, Ms. Nadra Nathai-Gyan, the IAC Secretary *Pro Tempore* held a meeting with EMA on March 10th, 2020.

EMA’s Managing Director, Mr. Hayden Romano, Ms. Danielle Lewis-Clarke, technical officer for Biodiversity, and Mrs. Xiomara Chin, Coordinator of the Strategy and Research Unit also participated in the meeting. The EMA representatives shared Trinidad & Tobago’s progress regarding sea turtle conservation, going from sea turtle fishery national ban to the declaration of the leatherback as an environmentally sensitive species. EMA is leading a long-term strategy for the conservation of this species and has requested the Cabinet to appoint a multiministerial and multidisciplinary task force to develop and implement it. This task force will be in charge of research, threats mitigation, and collaboration with international organizations including the IAC.

The IAC Secretary *PT* explained that the Convention began conversations with Trinidad & Tobago environmental authorities in 2010, exhorting them to become part of the IAC. Mr. Romano, EMA’s Director, requested a formal note from the IAC presenting their interest on Trinidad & Tobago becoming a member of the IAC, and committed to facilitate resuming the conversation with relevant governmental authorities in the country.



Representatives of Trinidad and Tobago’s Environmental Management Authority (EMA) -left- and representatives of the IAC Secretary *Pro Tempore* -right-.

IAC Secretary *PT* Attended the Laud OPO Conservation Network Regional Virtual Workshop 2020



Some of the LaudOPO Network attending the virtual workshop 2020

The Laud OPO Conservation Network Workshop was held on March 17th, 2020 with the participation of 30 of the members from eight countries, including the Secretary *Pro Tempore* of the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC).

The participants assessed the implementation of the [Regional Action Plan for Reversing the Decline of the East Pacific Leatherback](#) adopted in 2013. The assessment showed the results of the increased conservation efforts such as the successful involvement of fishers' communities that have become guardians of leatherback nesting beaches and challenges such as harmonizing monitoring protocols and sampling of environmental data such as temperature.

The meeting focused on the results from the last Laud OPO network publication ([The Laud OPO Network, 2020](#)) showing that to avoid extinction adult survivorship must increase by 20%, mainly by reducing mortality in fisheries bycatch. The Laud OPO Network coordinator, Dr. Bryan Wallace, presented an infographic also including a mechanism to reach this value such as targeting conservation efforts on priority sites constantly and for a long term; increasing the protection of leatherback nests; increasing resilience of nests protected implementing best practices for nests relocation and temperature control; reduce bycatch in fisheries with the highest interactions with leatherbacks; monitoring and reducing bycatch in high seas fisheries; and increasing the capacity of fishers regarding handling and release of leatherbacks on fishing vessels.

The benefits of the partnership IAC – LaudOPO were also discussed which, thanks to the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the IAC with the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC), resulted in a collaboration IAC-IATTC with the support of Dr. Wallace, to

assess the vulnerability of leatherbacks interacting with fishing operations based on the EASI-Fish approach, previously used for other species. The study aims to establish the best conservation and management measures to reduce the species vulnerability according to the IATTC [Resolution C-19-04](#) to mitigate impacts on sea turtles. Other ideas discussed, included IAC advocacy to support technology transfer among the countries in the Convention, such as models for dehookers, or facilitating conversations with governments for low-fee imports among the countries of the Network, of these and another type of tools.

Colombia presented a special chapter on the country sea turtle conservation progress, including the current update of the Sea Turtle Conservation National Program, conservation programs in the last loggerhead turtles nesting site in the north of the country (i.e. Alta Guajira), and monitoring Hawksbill products illegal trafficking such as cockfight spurs.

Like every year, this meeting allowed strengthening partnerships among the members of the network, including the IAC, and exchanging information to “keep up the fight” to save the Eastern Pacific leatherback from extinction.

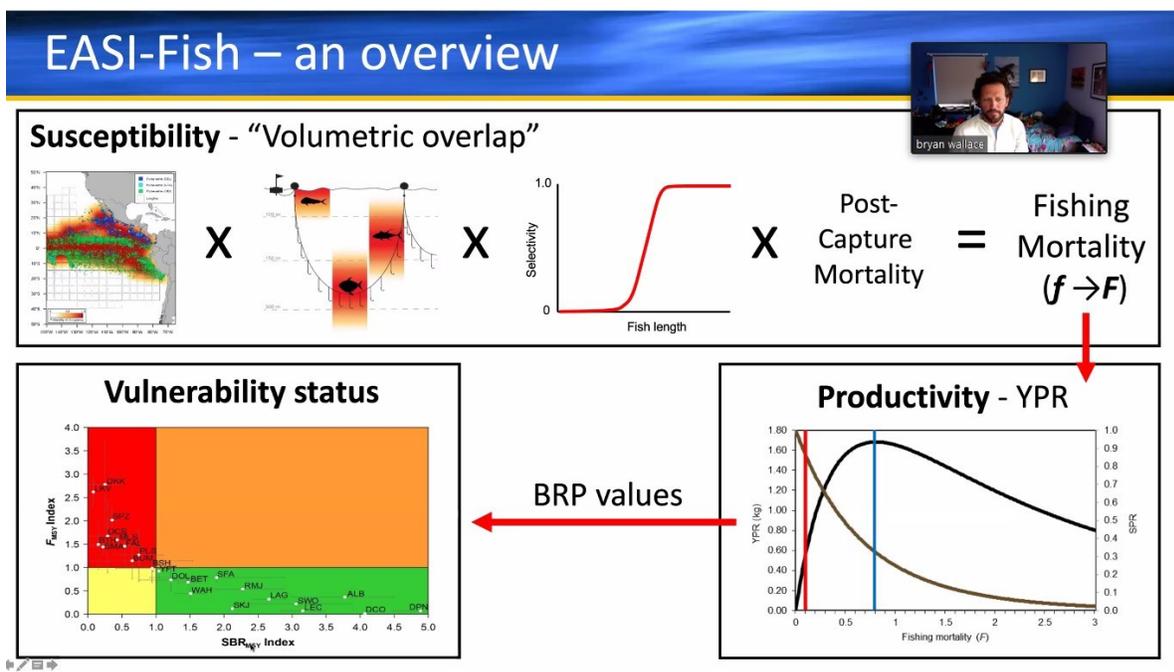


LAÚD OPO
RED LAÚD DEL OCÉANO
PACÍFICO ORIENTAL

EASI-Fish Model to assess the vulnerability of the Eastern Pacific Leatherback to the impact of fishing activities

Collaboration IATTC-IAC

Within the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding between the IAC and the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Convention (IATTC) and with the support of the LaudOPO Network, a collaboration was established to assess the EP Leatherbacks vulnerability to the impact of fishing activities using the model EASI-Fish. The process has been led by Dr. Bryan Wallace, coordinator of the IAC EP Leatherback Task Force and member of the IAC Consultative Committee.



Variables used for the EASI-Fish model on EP Leatherback © Dr. Bryan Wallace

The model uses a spatially-explicit ecological risk assessment (ERA) approach called Ecological Assessment for the Sustainable Impacts of Fisheries (EASI-Fish). This approach is designed for species with limited data available and was used to establish the most favorable conservation measures to bring the EP Leatherback from the most vulnerable to the least vulnerable status.

Results showed that the most effective and feasible conservation measure to reduce the EP Leatherback impact of bycatch is the training of fishermen in best handling and release practices in all fisheries, which could be enhanced by the use of circle hooks in longline fisheries and implementing closure in coastal fishing grounds adjacent to nesting areas. The implementation of this measure would bring the species closer to the action proposed by the Laud OPO Network (2020)¹ of increasing adults and sub-adults survival by 20% to guarantee the population survival.

1. The Laud OPO Network. 2020. Enhanced, coordinated conservation efforts required to avoid extinction of critically endangered Eastern Pacific leatherback turtles. *Sci Rep* 10, 4772 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-020-60581-7>



Some of the IAC delegates attending the EP Leatherback *EASI-Fish* model presentation

The model and results were presented by Dr. Wallace to the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtle Scientific Committee delegates and the members of the IAC EP Leatherback Task Force in a videoconference held on April 2, 2020. The delegates' comments to the document -Vulnerability Status and Efficacy of Potential Conservation Measures for the East Pacific Leatherback Turtle (*Dermochelys Coriacea*) Stock Using the EASI -Fish Approach- will be analyzed by the authors to include them in the document final version that will be submitted to the IATTC Working Group on Bycatch.

Preparation of the IAC Annual Report Questionnaire for the New Online Reporting System



The IAC Secretary *Pro Tempore* and the IAC Working Group for the Online Reporting System have been meeting to prepare the new questionnaire for the IAC Annual Report ORS during the first four months of 2020. Ten virtual meetings have been carried out with Mr. Roger Ingle the UN World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) Product Manager of Biodiversity Informatics to adapt the IAC Annual Report online version (IAC ORS).

It is expected that the IAC ORS be in place by the end of June 2020 for the first testing period by the working group, followed by the training for the IAC Parties personnel in charge of filling out the report every year.

Thirteenth Meeting of the IAC Consultative Committee of Experts (CCE13)



Some of the delegates attending the IAC 13th Consultative Committee Meeting

The 13th Meeting of the IAC Consultative Committee of Experts (CCE13), was held via video conference on April 14th, 2020. Delegates from thirteen IAC countries attended the meeting representing Argentina, Belize, Brazil, Caribbean Netherlands, Chile, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Guatemala, and the United States. The CCE sectorial members from the scientific community, industry, and non-governmental organizations (NGO) sectors also attended the meeting, with 32 participants.

The CCE Chair Dr. Paul Hoetjes provided a summary of the compliance with the CCE Work Plan in the previous year, and guided the discussions of the plenary to adopt the meeting recommendations listed below:

- 1- Inclusion of two new sections in the IAC Parties Annual Report, the first one to follow up on the implementation of the Northwest Atlantic (NWA) Leatherback Resolution, and the second section for IAC countries to report data on sea turtle bycatch in industrial longline fisheries.
- 2- The NWA Leatherback Working Group was established to increase the collaboration with SPAW Protocol, WIDECAST, and WWF, as they are also working on the protection of this Endangered population (according to the IUCN).
- 3 - The IAC Eastern Pacific leatherback task force was assigned to assess the compliance with the IAC East Pacific leatherback Resolution five-year strategic actions, and prepare a report to be presented at the IAC Conference of the Parties in 2021.
- 4 - Considering the concern on the impacts of artisanal fisheries on sea turtles, and the lack of data on this issue, a working group was formed to discuss the need and mechanisms to collect sea turtle bycatch data from small scale fisheries in the IAC countries.

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5- The CCE revised a draft text for a Memorandum of Understanding between IAC and the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), and the request from Stetson University College of Law to establish a cooperation agreement with IAC. The CCE recommended starting a dialogue with both organizations.

Mexico was nominated as new Chair of the Consultative Committee of Experts and the delegate from Ecuador, Mr. Eduardo Espinoza, accepted the position as Vice-Chair of the CCE.

The CCE expressed their gratitude to the former Chair, Dr. Paul Hoetjes, acknowledging his collaboration, support, and significant contributions to sea turtle conservation during his 15 years working with the IAC as the Caribbean Netherlands Focal Point, and for the last six years as the CCE Chair.

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Earth Day



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