



NEWS BULLETIN

Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles

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IAC highlights the importance of conserving the Sargasso Sea as a key sea turtle habitat

On March 11th, The IAC Secretary *Pro Tempore*, Ms. Veronica Caceres attended the signing of the Hamilton Declaration meeting organized by the Government of Bermuda and the Sargasso Sea Alliance (SSA) in support of the conservation of the Sargasso Sea as key habitat for sea turtles in the central Atlantic. IAC Secretary *PT* gave a presentation on the importance of the area for juvenile green, hawksbill, loggerhead and leatherback sea turtles as refuge, foraging and growth habitat.



Hamilton Declaration Group Photo

© Sargasso Sea Alliance

In this meeting, the Governments of Bermuda, The Azores, Monaco, United Kingdom and the United States signed the Hamilton Declaration on Collaboration for the Conservation of the Sargasso Sea. Representatives from other States and five International Organizations also expressed their support to the initiative. The 'Hamilton Declaration' is a non-binding political statement, which seeks protection for the Sargasso Sea using international bodies that regulate areas beyond national jurisdiction. It will provide a platform for the creation of a Sargasso Sea Commission, whose aim will be to minimize the adverse effects of shipping and fishing in the area, keeping it healthy and productive.

The Sargasso Sea is characterized for its floating Sargassum seaweeds which sustain and protect a wide variety of species. Some of them, like the Sargassum anglerfish, are unique to the area, and others like the eels and hawksbill sea turtles are critically endangered.

Due to the ecological importance of the Sargasso Sea as crucial habitat for endangered sea turtles, the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles and the Sargasso Sea Alliance would like to maximize collaboration to exchange scientific information, and expertise with the aim of protecting and managing this key sea turtle habitat in the Atlantic. The Executive Director of the SSA, Mr. David Freestone, identified IAC as a key partner organization to the Sargasso Sea Alliance. Currently, both organizations are planning their scientific collaboration aimed at improving the understanding of the sea turtles use and benefits of the Sargasso Sea habitat.



From left-right: David Freestone, SSA; Hon. Craig Cannonier Premier of Bermuda; Dr. Derrick Binns, Cabinet Secretary © IAC Secretariat *PT*

IAC and Bermuda Government begin dialogue

On March 14th, IAC Secretary *PT* had a meeting with Bermuda's Government officials Dr. Drew Pettit, Director of Conservation Services of the Ministry of Public Works and Dr. Ian Walker, Principal Curator, Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo. This meeting is the first step to the consultation process for the accession of Bermuda to the IAC. The result from the dialogue was positive, as it recognized that Bermuda already fulfills most of the requirements to become a IAC Member Party. Bermuda is an important area for sea turtles foraging, development and growth, and plays a critical role in the global conservation of sea turtles. There is a history of sea turtle protection legislation that goes back to the 1600's and a long time series of data collection dating back to 1960. Also, there is a solid base of scientific knowledge and understanding of sea turtles in Bermuda. We will continue to work with our colleagues in Bermuda to support their accession to IAC in the near future.

Research Activities in the IAC Countries

Increased knowledge about Loggerhead turtles (*Caretta caretta*) during their first years

Little is known on the first years of sea turtles' life, often called "the lost years". A research team from the University of Central Florida set satellite transmitters on a group of loggerhead turtles hatchlings (*Caretta caretta*), in order to track their journey from the time they leave the Eastern US coast into the Atlantic Ocean. The results indicate that the turtles leave the superficial oceanic currents of the Northern Atlantic gyre and spend more time than expected in the Sargasso sea. According to the researchers, during this time turtles live among the Sargassum seaweed. This area and the algae provides protection from predators and food. Also the area becomes a warm floating micro-habitat for these reptiles.

Technology is allowing scientist to increase the knowledge on the whereabouts of sea turtles during their first life stages. In the past, genetic studies, incidental by-catch and the occasional sighting of sea turtles suggested that this specie traveled in a large circle using the North Atlantic ocean currents. They came to the Azores and Cape Verde before returning to the Gulf of Mexico and Florida.



© BBC Mundo

The complete article can be found here: <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1669807-las-misteriosas-vacaciones-juveniles-de-las-tortugas-bobas>

Mapping areas in the Atlantic Ocean where leatherback turtles and longline fisheries coincide

The Atlantic Ocean is home to the last large populations of leatherback turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*). Due to its highly migratory nature, this species is particularly vulnerable to incidental by-catch, therefore mitigating this threat becomes a conservation priority. A group of scientists combined satellite data showing tracks from over 100 turtles between 1995 and 2010, with longline-fisheries data to identify areas of low, medium and high interaction between fishery activity and sea turtles. As a result, the team identified nine zones in the Atlantic Ocean where leatherbacks habitat use and longline fisheries are most likely to clash. This results were reinforced by reports on incidental by-catch in 8 of the 9 identified zones. Among the nations with regions where susceptibility to by-catch is likely to be high within their exclusive economic zones are: Cape Verde, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, Senegal, Spain, USA and Western Sahara in the northern Atlantic; and Angola, Brazil, Namibia and UK in the southern Atlantic.

These tools will provide stakeholders with information on the location of sea turtles in order for them to make an informed decision on where and what gear to use in their fisheries to avoid by-catch. Thus, preventing the decline of the Atlantic population of leatherbacks.

This article was co-authored by colleagues from IAC Scientific and Consultative Committees. To view the complete paper published by Proceedings of the Royal Society entitled "Pan-Atlantic analysis of the overlap of a highly migratory species, the leatherback turtle, with pelagic longline fisheries" visit: <http://bit.ly/1otsb3m>.



Members of Honduran Navy in rescue operation © La Prensa.hn

Honduran Navy Rescues 16 Hawksbills

In mid-march, the Honduran Navy rescued 16 Hawksbill turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) in the north-eastern Department of Gracias a Dios in Honduras. The turtles were found on a fishermen boat. Captain Geovani Matamoros informed that all turtles were alive and they were relocated back to their habitat. The IAC Secretariat PT congratulated the Honduran Navy on this action. Contralmirante Héctor Caballero, General Commander of the Honduran Navy expressed their commitment to continue protecting flora and fauna, specially sea turtle because of the benefits they bring to marine ecosystems.

Sea turtle nesting season monitoring begins in Galapagos

On January 11th, Galapagos National Park began its sea turtle monitoring program, for nesting season December-June 2014. Park rangers set up a permanent camp in the Quinta Beach on the Isabela island. This beach was identified as the main nesting site for green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) in Ecuador. On early March a total of 423 females sea turtles had been registered, of them 263 were tagged for the first time, 63 were re-migrants from the previous nesting seasons and 97 were recaptured from the same season. A total of 257 nest had been registered. Personnel from the National Park informed that the hatching rate depends on the season and environmental conditions, but historically it has been of 60 percent.

For more information, contact png@galapagos.gob.ec, info@galapagos.gob.ec, or visit www.galapagos.gob.ec



Nesting Hawksbill
© BICA-Utilla

Eastern Pacific Hawksbill turtle connectivity between Nicaragua and Costa Rica

A research team led by the Eastern Pacific Hawksbill Initiative (ICAPO) confirmed that adult female Hawksbill turtle tagged in Nicaragua occupy the mangrove area in the Gulf of Nicoya in Costa Rica. The team led by ICAPO with the collaboration of students from the Costa Rica University and researchers from Widecast and Pretoma followed up on reports from several organization on movement of adult sea turtles from their nesting beaches in Nicaragua to the mangrove areas in Costa Rica. Satellite tracking devices placed on adult sea turtles confirmed that the individual remained for at least 150 days in the mangroves in Costa Rica. This information was confirmed with field visit and inspections to the Nicoya Gulf area, where an adult hawksbill found had metal tags from the Estero Padre Ramos in Nicaragua and was reported nesting several times during the 2012 season.

These results are important as they provide information on the behavior of the Eastern Pacific Hawksbill and help identify their key habitats. This research highlights the importance of promoting coordination among regional conservation efforts for the protection of this critically endangered specie and their habitat.

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The complete article can be found: <http://www.pretoma.org/es/pacific-hawksbill-turtle-connectivity-confirmed-between-nicaragua-and-costa-rica/>



Research team © PRETOMA

Upcoming Events

- ✓ **34th Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation**
New Orleans, Louisiana, USA; April 10-17, 2014
<http://iconferences.seaturtle.org/>
- ✓ **18th International In-water course: Biology and Conservation of Sea Turtles**
Bermuda; August 4-15, 2014
Deadline for Inscription: **April 15th, 2014**
Please send all enquiries to: Bookings.bzs@gov.bm and cc: Jennifer Gray (jgray@bnt.bm)
- ✓ **7th Meeting of the IAC Consultative Committee of Experts (CCE)**
Gulfport, Florida from June 4-6, 2014
For more information, please contact: secretario@iacseaturtle.org or smendez.cit@gmail.com

We invite you to send news of courses, research results, and other activities related to sea turtles and their conservation. Send your article in a Word file and photograph in JPG format to smendez.cit@gmail.com.