



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

The 11th Meeting of the IAC Scientific Committee



Participants of the 11th meeting of the IAC Scientific Committee, at "Dirección de Hidrografía y Oceanografía Marina de Guerra del Perú".
Photo: Martha Prada.

Delegates and experts from 13 countries in the Western Hemisphere assembled in Lima, Peru to attend the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC) 11th Scientific Committee Meeting (SC11). The meeting took place from 24 -26 of September 2014, at the "Dirección de Hidrografía y Navegación de la Marina de Guerra del Perú", with support from the Government of Peru through "Instituto del Mar del Peru (IMARPE)" under the leadership of Mr. Jorge Zuzunaga, as the meeting chairman.

The SC11 meeting discussed the progress in the implementation of their 2014 Work Plan through reports of the inter-session working groups on the following topics: (1) Fisheries Interactions with Sea Turtles; (2) Sea Turtle Stranding; (3) Climate Change and Impacts on Sea Turtle Habitats; and (4) Exceptions.



Plenary discussions during the 11th meeting of the IAC Scientific Committee.
Photo: Martha Prada.

Scientists carefully reviewed the technical documentation of the exemption presented by Costa Rica in their management plan for the *Lepidochelys olivacea* egg harvest at Ostional beach, and provided recommendations to the management plan to better assess the population abundance of sea turtles in Ostional beach. Those recommendations will be considered by the IAC Consultative Committee of Experts.

Two IAC Technical Documents were approved, the first one entitled "*IAC Nesting Beach Data Analysis (2009-2013)*" the goal of this report is to provide information on nesting beach abundance for all IAC countries that host nesting; the second is entitled "*Recommendations of Manuals for Handling of Sea Turtles on Board of Fishing Vessels*". Both documents will be soon available on the IAC website. The SC11 also provided recommendations on environmental parameters that can be taken on index beaches to monitor the impact of climate change.



Discussion and analysis in Working Groups at the 11th meeting of the IAC Scientific Committee. Photo: Martha Prada.

The meeting adjourned with the election of Dr. Diego Albareda (Argentina) as Chairman of the Scientific Committee and Lic. Francisco Ponce (Chile) as Vice - Chairman. The next meeting will be held in Chile in 2015.

The participants acknowledged the organizational efforts and hospitality the host, the Government of Peru.



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Coiba National Park in Panama, a Refuge for Hawksbill Turtles in the Eastern Pacific



Dr. Jeffrey Seminoff from NOAA, catching a juvenile hawksbill turtle.
Photo: Marino Abrego, ARAP.

Six years ago, it was believed that the Hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) turtle was extinct in the Latin American Pacific coast, however recent research shows its presence, although it is still in low numbers. It has been estimated that the number of nesting females is less than 500 throughout the Eastern Pacific from Mexico to Peru.

After the first hawksbill turtle was found and fitted with a satellite transmitter in the Las Perlas Archipelago, in July 2013, an international and inter-institutional team decided to work collaboratively in Panama in the search for Hawksbills. The team was comprised by personnel from NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) from the United States, the Eastern Pacific Hawksbill Initiative (ICAPO), "Campamento Tortuguero Eco Mayto A.C" from Mexico, the Aquatic Resources Authority of Panama (ARAP), the National Environmental Authority (ANAM) and the National Naval Service (SENAN) from Panama. The team decided to look for sea turtles in the Coiba National Park also a World Heritage Site.



Release of tagged hawksbill male.
Photo: Marino Abrego, ARAP

In the first field trip on September 5, 2014, 10 sea turtles were caught in one hour, they were measured and released back to the ocean. After three days, 100 hawksbills were observed. The team fitted a satellite transmitter on one turtle named "Mali", she can be tracked online at the NOAA/ICAPO Website http://www.seaturtle.org/tracking/index.shtml?tag_id=60619&full=1&lang=.

Researchers monitored the Yellow River beach, about 700 meters long, where 72 recent sea turtle tracks were reported, of which about 95% were from green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) and the remaining 5% from Olive Ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*).

Panama as member of the IAC will start a sea turtle monitoring program in this protected area in short-term, considering the high abundances found. Members of the IAC Scientific Committee from Panama and the United States are involved in this research.

For more information in Panama, contact Marino Abrego, biologist from the Aquatic Resources Authority of Panama, and Panama delegate to the IAC Scientific Committee. Website: <http://www.arap.gob.pa/>
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Work Team in Coiba National Park with tagged "Mali" Turtle.
Photo: Marino Abrego, ARAP.

We invite you to send us news on courses, research and other activities related to sea turtles and their conservation.

Submit your article in a Word file and photography in JPG format to the e-mail: mprada.cit@gmail.com

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