

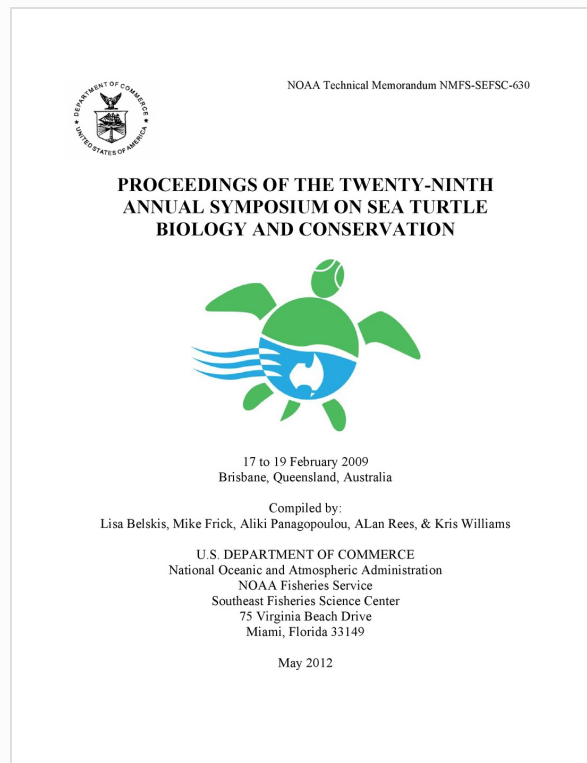


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# A Tri-National Aerial Survey of Leatherback Nesting Activity in New Guinea and The Solomon Islands

*by* Scott Benson

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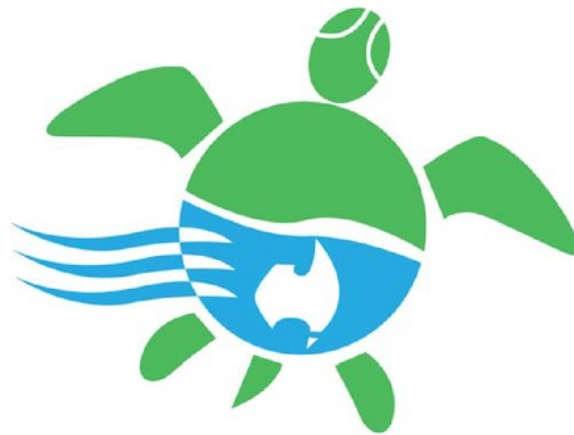
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NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-SEFSC-630

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE TWENTY-NINTH  
ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM ON SEA TURTLE  
BIOLOGY AND CONSERVATION**



17 to 19 February 2009  
Brisbane, Queensland, Australia

Compiled by:  
Lisa Belskis, Mike Frick, Aliko Panagopoulou, Alan Rees, & Kris Williams

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
NOAA Fisheries Service  
Southeast Fisheries Science Center  
75 Virginia Beach Drive  
Miami, Florida 33149

May 2012



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<b>Pacific Islands Region Meeting</b>	Lui Bell
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<b>Freshwater Turtle Symposium</b>	Arthur Georges, Chuck Shaffer, Kate Hodges & Deb Bower
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## **STUDENT AWARDS**

---

There were 103 student presentations – 39 papers and 64 posters with \$3,000 US awarded to eight recipients. The awards committee was composed of Lisa Campbell, Matthew Godfrey, Jeanette Wyneken. Judges were Karen Arthur, Ken Lohmann, Melissa Snover, Dave Owens, Annette Broderick, Sheryan Epperly, Kirstin Fritsches, Thane Wibbels, Zoe Meletis, Bryan Wallace, Nick Pilcher, Kiki Dethmers, Marydelle Donnelly, Anna Barragan and Andrea Phillott. The awards were financed by the Chelonian Research Foundation and the International Sea Turtle Society.

### **ORAL PRESENTATIONS**

#### **Best Biology Oral Presentation**

First Prize: **Wendy Dow**, Duke University, USA

In-water and in-air hearing sensitivity of the juvenile green sea turtle (*Chelonia mydas*).

Runner up: **Hoyt Peckham**, UC Santa Cruz, USA

Demographic and conservation implications of alternative foraging strategies in juvenile loggerhead turtles.

#### **Best Conservation Oral Presentation**

First Prize: **David Pike**, University of Sydney, Australia

Climatic change and changes in sea turtle nesting distributions.

Runner up: **Mariana MPB Fuentes**, James Cook University, Australia

Assessing the vulnerability of key sea turtle rookeries to predicted geographic shifts in cyclone activity.

### **POSTER PRESENTATIONS**

#### **Best Biology Poster Presentation**

First Prize: **Suzanne E Roden**, NOAA Fisheries - Southwest Fisheries Science Center / University of San Diego, USA. Detecting green turtle population structure in the Pacific using single nucleotide polymorphisms (snps).

Runner up: **Kimberly Reich**, University of Florida, USA

Effects of repeated tissue sampling on the growth of immature loggerhead turtles; a controlled study.

#### **Best Conservation Poster Presentation**

First Prize: **Juan Patiño-Martínez**, Estación Biológica de Doñana. Spain

The accumulation of driftwood on the beach disturb leatherback nesting and newborn behaviour affecting reproductive success.

Runner up: **Antonio Nogueira**, Wildlife Conservation Society

The use of geographic information system (GIS) for the support of the marine turtle research and conservation in Soyo, northern Angola.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

COMMITTEES, CHAIRS, AND KEY ORGANIZERS.....	iii
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND BOARD ORGANIZERS.....	iv
SPONSORS AND CONTRIBUTORS.....	v
STUDENT AWARDS.....	vi

Abstract titles marked with an \* denote Oral Presentations

### AUSTRALIA MINI-SYMPOSIUM

DO MANAGEMENT PLANS OR TRADITIONAL USE AND CONSERVATION AGREEMENTS REALLY CHANGE HOW MANY TURTLES ARE TAKEN BY INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES? WORKING TOWARDS DEVELOPING REAL SUSTAINABLE TURTLE HUNTING PRACTICES IN NORTH QUEENSLAND*	
<b>Ian P. Bell and James Gaston</b> .....	1
MAKING TURTLES COUNT ON THE NSW NORTH COAST*	
<b>Marny Bonner, Keith Williams, and Rochelle Ferris</b> .....	1
DRAFT MARINE TURTLE RECOVERY PLAN FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA*	
<b>Tamra F. Chapman, Alan Kendrick, Keith Morris, Fran Stanley, and Marissa Speirs</b> .....	2
A SURVEY PROGRAM TO LOCATE AND DOCUMENT THE DISTRIBUTION AND STATUS OF MARINE TURTLE NESTING AROUND THE COASTLINE OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY OF AUSTRALIA*	
<b>Ray Chatto</b> .....	2
THE EFFECT OF INCUBATION TEMPERATURE ON MORPHOLOGY AND RUNNING PERFORMANCE OF LOGGERHEAD SEA TURTLE HATCHLINGS FROM MON REPOS, AUSTRALIA	
<b>Cuong The Chu, David Booth, and Colin Limpus</b> .....	3
DIET AND FEEDING BIOLOGY OF ADULT OLIVE RIDLEY ( <i>LEPIDOCHELYS OLIVACEA</i> ) AND LOGGERHEAD ( <i>CARETTA CARETTA</i> ) SEA TURTLES IN FOG BAY, NORTHERN TERRITORY, AUSTRALIA	
<b>Shaun P. Conway and Michael L. Guinea</b> .....	4
TUDU TURTLE FORAGING POPULATION MONITORING, WAPA AND TIDIU MAZA (WARRIOR AND DUNGENESS REEF)*	
<b>Charles David, Frank Loban, and Mark Hamann</b> .....	4
ESTIMATING NESTING SUCCESS AT A HIGH-DENSITY GREEN TURTLE ROOKERY ON RAINE ISLAND, QUEENSLAND, USING DISTANCE SAMPLING AND LINE TRANSECTS*	
<b>Nancy F. FitzSimmons, Anton D. Tucker, Duncan J. Limpus, and Colin J. Limpus</b> .....	5
NEST DEPTH AND TEMPERATURE LIMIT THE CLUTCH SUCCESS OF FLATBACK TURTLES ON BARROW ISLAND, WESTERN AUSTRALIA	
<b>Claire Foster, Kellie Pendoley, Dorian Moro, and Harriet Mills</b> .....	5
THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY'S MARINE WILDLIFE STRANDING PROJECT*	
<b>Jenny Greenland</b> .....	6
MACKAY AND DISTRICT TURTLE WATCH ASSOCIATION - BUILDING, MAINTAINING AND CONTINUING OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS	
<b>Ken Griffin, Cath Maclean, and Mark Hamann</b> .....	6
TWENTY YEARS OF NESTING, HATCHING AND EMERGENCE SUCCESS OF FLATBACK SEA TURTLES ( <i>NATATOR DEPRESSUS</i> ) IN THE BARE SAND ISLAND DISTRICT OF FOG BAY, NORTHERN TERRITORY, AUSTRALIA*	
<b>Michael L. Guinea</b> .....	7

## **BREEDING BIOLOGY**

BODY WEIGHT AND THE ENERGY BUDGET OF GRAVID HAWKSBILL TURTLES ( <i>ERETMOCHELYS IMBRICATA</i> ) DURING THE NESTING SEASON Armando Barsante, Eliza M. X. Freire, Claudio Bellini, and Gilberto Corso .....	19
A TRI-NATIONAL AERIAL SURVEY OF LEATHERBACK NESTING ACTIVITY IN NEW GUINEA AND THE SOLOMON ISLANDS Scott Benson, Vagi Rei, Creusa Hitipeuw, Betuel Samber, Ricardo Tapilatu, John Pita, Peter Ramohia, Patrick Pikacha, Joe Horoku, Bas Wurlanty, and Barry Krueger .....	19
THE EFFECT OF RELOCATION AND KEY ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS ON LOGGERHEAD SEA TURTLE ( <i>CARETTA CARETTA</i> ) NESTS ON CAPE ISLAND, SOUTH CAROLINA, USA * Melissa Bimbi, Sarah Dawsey, and Derk Bergquist .....	20
FIRST EVER POPULATION CENSUS OF NESTING LOGGERHEADS ON SAL ISLAND, CABO VERDE Jacquie Cozens, Manuel Pereira, Edson Mendes, and Rachel Miles .....	21
SWOT TECH SUPPORT – BRINGING THE SWOT GLOBAL SEA TURTLE DATABASE ADVANCED MAPPING CAPABILITIES AND NEW UTILITIES Andrew DiMatteo, Bryan Wallace, Ei Fujioka, Pat Halpin, and Andy Read .....	21
50 YEARS DOWN THE WINDWARD ROAD: REFLECTIONS ON SEA TURTLE POPULATIONS AT TORTUGUERO, COSTA RICA* Emma Harrison and David Godfrey .....	22
ENCOURAGING NEWS FROM BUCK ISLAND REEF NATIONAL MONUMENT: STATUS AND TRENDS IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM Zandy Hillis-Starr and Ian F. Lundgren .....	22
SOME AGED FEMALES LACK NESTING EXPERIENCE* Takashi Ishihara and Naoki Kamezaki .....	23
TEMPORAL AND SPATIAL EVALUATION OF NATURAL PREDATION ON THE KEMP'S RIDLEY, AN ARRIBADA SPECIES Anne M. LeBlanc, Thane Wibbels, Marco Antonio-P., Gloria Tavera , Diana J. Lira-R. , Hector J. Martinez-O., Jaime Pena-V. , Patrick M. Burchfield , Earl Possardt , and Barbara Schroeder .....	23
PROJECT TO DETERMINE THE DISTRIBUTION AND POPULATION SIZES OF NESTING MARINE TURTLES IN NEW CALEDONIA, AND TO ENHANCE THE CAPACITY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS TO PROTECT AND MANAGE THESE SPECIES Colin Limpus, Sophie Mounier, and Ahab Downer .....	24
SEA TURTLE NEST PREDATION DYNAMICS: IMPLICATIONS FOR CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT* Guilherme O. Longo, Sergio R. Floeter, Fernando D. Pazeto, and João A. G. de Abreu .....	24
TOWARD A COMPREHENSIVE MODEL TO MAXIMIZE THE PRODUCTIVITY OF HAWKSBILL NESTING BEACHES: DECIDING WHERE TO RELOCATE IMPERILED NESTS AT BUCK ISLAND REEF NATIONAL MONUMENT Ian Lundgren and Zandy Hillis-Starr .....	25
THE EFFECTS OF COMMON LOGGERHEAD NEST MANAGEMENT METHODS ON NEST SUCCESS ON SAPELO ISLAND, GEORGIA, USA * Mandi L. McElroy, Mark G. Dodd, and Steven B. Castleberry .....	25
LOGGERHEAD AND ATLANTIC GREEN SEA TURTLE NESTING AND HATCHING TRENDS ON EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, FLORIDA FROM 1995 THROUGH 2008 Bob Miller and Kristin Smith .....	26
THERMAL MICROENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES ON THE CRITICAL INCUBATION TEMPERATURE FOR OLIVE RIDLEY SEA TURTLES AT OSTIONAL, COSTA RICA Flor de Maria Gomez Mosqueira, Mark T. Tordoir, and Roldán A. Valverde .....	27
THE USE OF GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEM (GIS) FOR THE SUPPORT OF THE MARINE TURTLE RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION IN SOYO, NORTHERN ANGOLA Antonio Nogueira, Angela Formia, Betania Ferreira, Warren Klein, Tim Bayhnam, and Howard Rosenbaum.27	
METAPOPOPULATION THEORY AND SEA TURTLES: BRIDGING OR WIDENING THE GAP?*	
Lindsey Peavey, Victoria Gonzalez Carmen, and Larry Crowder .....	28
EFFECT OF STORM FREQUENCY ON THE LEATHERBACK HATCHING SUCCESS Liliana Quiñones, Juan Patino-Martínez, and Adolfo Marco .....	28

## **BREEDING BIOLOGY**

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### **BODY WEIGHT AND THE ENERGY BUDGET OF GRAVID HAWKSBILL TURTLES (*ERETMOCHELYS IMBRICATA*) DURING THE NESTING SEASON**

Armando Barsante<sup>1,2</sup>, Eliza M. X. Freire<sup>2</sup>, Claudio Bellini<sup>3</sup>, and Gilberto Corso<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fundação Pro-Tamar, Natal, Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil

<sup>2</sup> Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte, Natal, Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil

<sup>3</sup> Projeto Tamar – Instituto C.M.C. Bio, Fernando de Noronha, Pernambuco, Brazil

Female hawksbill turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) nesting along the southeast coastline of Rio Grande do Norte State, Brazil (6°13'40"S, 35°03'05"W) were captured and weighed during the 2006/2007 and 2007/2008 egg-laying seasons. The mean value for the first post-oviposition weight was 79.6 kg (range 56.2 – 105.7 kg; SD = 11.3 kg; n = 72 females). Those individuals which were subsequently recaptured showed a mean weight loss of 1.6 kg (range -3.7 – 5.1; SD = 1.43; n = 75 sets of measurements on 36 females) in the interval between two consecutive post-oviposition (i.e. after one interesting interval). In the cases where the female aborted the nesting process, the pre-oviposition weight was measured. The total effective egg-laying investment was found to be 5.46 kg (range 4.3 – 8.2; SD = 1.09; n = 12 sets of measurements). The mean recovery in body weight was found to be 3.2 kg (range 1.8 – 4.6; SD = 1.05; n = 9 sets of measurements). The recovery in body weight was found to be always significantly lower ( $p < 0.005$ ) than the total effective egg-laying investment. This is in agreement with the observed weight loss tendency throughout the breeding season for this species. The weight recovery was analysed using allometric law, converting both loss in body weight and total egg-weight to energy. Using mean body weight of the turtle we calculated that the metabolic maintenance rate of the hawksbill turtle during the nesting period to be 2870 kJ d<sup>-1</sup> and the energy that the turtles expended in egg-laying to be 1183 kJ d<sup>-1</sup>. The daily net weight loss converted into energy is 4213 kJ d<sup>-1</sup>. The total daily energy consumption (maintenance plus egg production) is of the same magnitude as the daily energy from weight loss. We argue that there is no reason for a significant extra intake of energy during the oviposition period. Hence we conclude that the observed weight recovery is due to rehydration. Acknowledgements: Santuário Ecológico de Pipa, Projeto TAMAR ICMBio, Programa de Estudos e Pesquisas em Preservação Ambiental nas Áreas Marítimo Terrestre da Bacia Potiguar (IBAMA-UFRN-FUNPEC-PETROBRAS). We also thank the Australian Government DEWHA, Queensland Environmental Protection Agency, Disney Animal Kingdom, Western Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Council, US National Marine Fisheries Service, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Marine Turtle Conservation Fund) and the International Sea Turtle Symposium.

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### **A TRI-NATIONAL AERIAL SURVEY OF LEATHERBACK NESTING ACTIVITY IN NEW GUINEA AND THE SOLOMON ISLANDS**

Scott Benson<sup>1</sup>, Vagi Rei<sup>2</sup>, Creusa Hitipeuw<sup>3</sup>, Betuel Samber<sup>4</sup>, Ricardo Tapilatu<sup>5</sup>, John Pita<sup>6</sup>, Peter Ramohia<sup>6</sup>, Patrick Pikacha<sup>6</sup>, Joe Horoku<sup>7</sup>, Bas Wurlanty<sup>8</sup>, and Barry Krueger<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The Nature Conservancy, Honiara, Solomon Islands

<sup>7</sup> Department of Environment and Conservation, Honiara, Solomon Islands

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<sup>9</sup> Marine Research Foundation, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia

Western Pacific leatherback turtles have declined during the past two decades, and obtaining accurate estimates of current nesting population size is essential for future leatherback recovery. Telemetry studies conducted from nesting beaches in Papua New Guinea (PNG), Solomon Islands, and Papua Barat, Indonesia have revealed that this meta-population is comprised of multiple foraging populations that nest throughout the year. Declines have been apparent to local villagers in most areas, but conservation and protection is hindered by a lack of knowledge of nesting population size and distribution. Comprehensive regional aerial surveys were conducted along the north coast of New Guinea and adjacent islands, and throughout the Solomon Islands during January-February 2004-2007, and in July 2005. The objectives of the surveys were to determine significant nesting beaches outside of monitored areas and to lay the groundwork for estimating the nesting population size of Western Pacific leatherbacks. Leatherback nests were counted by 2-3 observers from a fixed-wing aircraft flying at 200 ft (61 m) altitude using established methods. Coordinated ground counts were conducted at 11 beaches throughout the region where monitoring and protection programs had previously been established, to allow estimation of errors associated with aerial detection of nests. The greatest densities of leatherback nests were encountered on the northern Bird's Head coast of Papua Barat, and along the Huon Gulf of PNG. Limited nesting was observed within the Solomon Islands, with the greatest number of nests on Santa Isabel Island. Previously undocumented nesting beaches were identified on Bougainville Island, including one large concentration on the south-eastern coast. Scattered nests were also observed on the northern and southern coasts of New Britain, PNG. This study represents the first tri-national assessment of Western Pacific leatherback nesting activity and results will be used to develop new monitoring and conservation programs at key nesting beaches.

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## **THE EFFECT OF RELOCATION AND KEY ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS ON LOGGERHEAD SEA TURTLE (*CARETTA CARETTA*) NESTS ON CAPE ISLAND, SOUTH CAROLINA, USA\***

Melissa Bimbi<sup>1</sup>, Sarah Dawsey<sup>2</sup>, and Derk Bergquist<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> College of Charleston and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Charleston, SC, USA

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge, Awendaw, South Carolina, USA

<sup>3</sup> South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, Marine Resources Research Institute, Charleston, SC, USA

Cape Island is the northernmost barrier island of the Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge located in Charleston County, South Carolina. This 10 km undeveloped beach supports the highest density nesting for the Atlantic northern sub-population of loggerhead sea turtles (*Caretta caretta*), an area that extends from Amelia Island, Florida through Virginia. In order to determine the effect of nest relocation on hatch success, emergence success, incubation duration, and incubation temperature during the sex-determining period, relocated and in-situ nests were monitored throughout the entire 2008 nesting season. This study is an expansion of a 2007 study that compared in-situ nests to nests relocated into hatcheries during June and July. Key environmental factors such as sand characteristics, vegetation, and elevation were examined in both relocated and in-situ nests. MicroDAQ LogTag temperature data loggers with a +0.1°C were placed in the approximate center of relocated nests and in-situ nests during the entire incubation duration. Sediment samples were collected 1 m from each nest with a push core representing an integrated average of sediment characteristics within the egg chamber. Vegetation was determined by counting stems and identifying plants to the lowest practical taxonomic level around each nest. The elevation of each nest was determined using a Trimble R-8 GPS unit. Preliminary analysis of the data indicates there are no differences in elevation, vegetation, incubation duration, hatch success, emergence success, or sediment characteristics except moisture content between in-situ and relocated nests. These preliminary results suggest that nest relocation on Cape Island is an effective management tool. Thanks go out to the Australian Government DEWHA, Queensland Environmental Protection Agency, Disney Animal Kingdom, Western Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Council, U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Marine Turtle Conservation Fund), the Marisla Foundation, and the International Sea Turtle Symposium for providing travel funding.

# A Tri-National Aerial Survey of Leatherback Nesting Activity in New Guinea and The Solomon Islands

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