



Development of the Turtle Awareness and Protection Studies (TAPS) Program on Roatan, Honduras



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Protective Turtle Ecology Center for Training, Outreach and Research, Inc.

Local Capacity Building

Nesting Beach Monitoring Network

Education Outreach

Health Monitoring of Captive Sea Turtles

Honduras Sea Turtle Active Research Workshops

Satellite Tracking of Nesting Females

Turtle Awareness and Protection Studies (TAPS)

Why We Started

Sea Turtles in Honduras continue to face entanglement in commercial nets, being captured as food, increasing pollution and loss of habitat (Carr *et al.*, 1982; Cruz & Espinal, 1987). Still, little work has been done to investigate any aspect of turtle life history in any area of Honduras (Carr *et al.*, 1982; RCA, 2001; Bräutigam & Eckert, 2006). We started TAPS to undertake research to provide data to decision-makers and conservation workers interested in protecting Honduras' remaining turtle populations.



What We're Doing

Initially, turtles are bought from local fishermen to be temporarily held until they are inspected, weighed and measured.



The protective turtle pool in which turtles are temporarily housed until they are tagged and released.



Turtles are monitored for changes in weight.



Various means are used to check for general health.



Straight lengths and widths are tracked over time.



Data is logged and linked to photographs in the project database.



ID tags are placed on front and rear flippers of each turtle.

What We Know, So Far

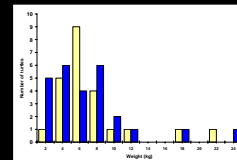


Figure 1. Number of turtles in 2 kg weight classes for all turtles measured at T1 (■) and T2 (■). Numbers along the x-axis represent the highest weight in a given class.

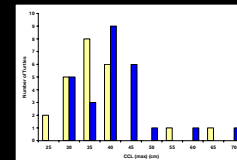


Figure 2. Number of turtles in 5 cm curved carapace length classes for all turtles measured at T1 (■) and T2 (■). Numbers along the x-axis represent the highest weight in a given class.

1. Turtles captured by artisanal fishermen over this time (March – July, 2006) are generally juveniles from 2-25kg and range in length (CCL_{max}) from 25-70cm (Fig. 1, Fig. 2).
2. 83% of juveniles associated with TAPS are hawksbills, 17% are greens.
3. Abundances of all species are down, according to anecdotal reports.
4. Data are lacking for all aspects of sea turtle life history in Honduras.

Where We're Headed

1. Radio telemetry studies are beginning in Roatan, but will eventually be conducted nation-wide.
2. GIS mapping of nesting beaches has begun on Roatan. Will start in other Bay Islands.
3. A nesting beach monitoring network is planned to begin in Roatan, June, 2007.
4. Establishment of community-based conservation efforts and capacity-building through diver-assisted monitoring.



Reported nesting beaches will be mapped and analyzed in GIS for confirmation of nesting use. Maps of current use can be compared with maps of historical use.



Outreach to residents and visitors is increasing awareness of the status and plight of sea turtles in Honduras. These aid conservation efforts on local and global scales.

Capacity building for community-based conservation efforts takes the form of local involvement in the TAPS research, local-scale monitoring and training in the use of conservation tools, such as GPS and GIS.



Our Objectives

1. Work with Bay Island fishermen to minimize the taking of turtles for food.
2. Build community capacity for conservation efforts.
3. Begin intensive tagging and monitoring program.
4. Determine home ranges, food preferences and habitat use of juvenile hawksbills and greens around the Bay Islands (In-water).
5. Begin a nesting beach mapping, monitoring and tagging network in the Bay Islands.
6. Satellite tag adults and juveniles.
7. Provide information currently unavailable on turtles from Honduras.

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