

Assessment of Feral Animal Predation Associated with Flatback Nesting Beaches at Mundabullangana Station

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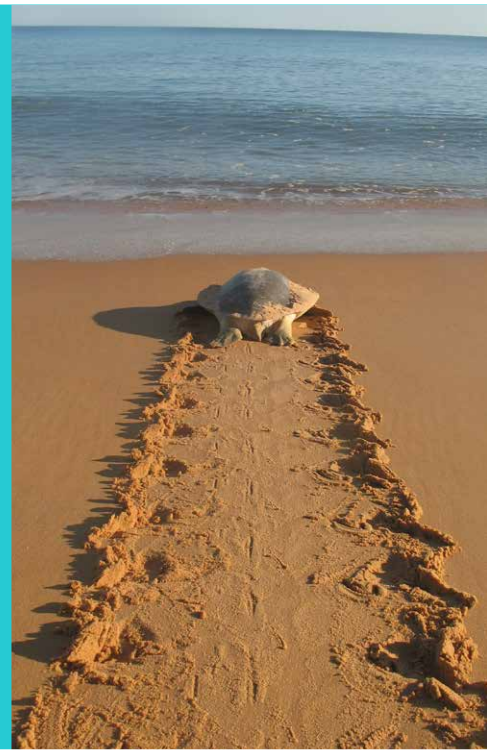
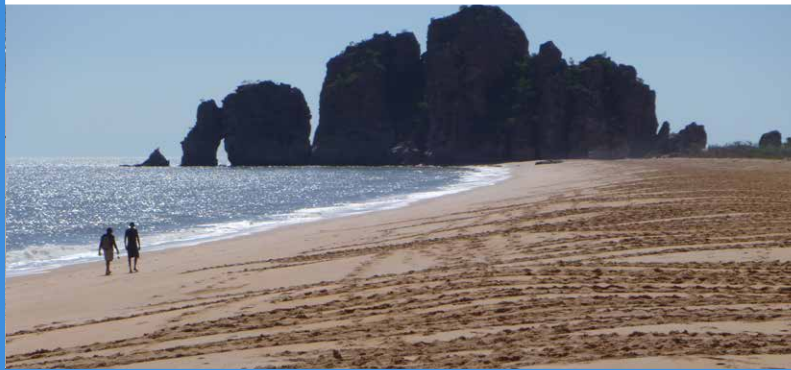
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Feral animal predation on marine turtle nests is recognised globally as a threat to hatching success. The red fox is widespread along the coastline of the Pilbara region in Western Australia which is an important nesting area for a number of marine turtle species. To better understand the extent of fox predation and assist in threat mitigation decision making we undertook a nest monitoring pilot study during the 2013-14 nesting season at Mundabullangana Station, located approximately 70km south of Port Hedland. This site is a significant flatback rookery with an estimated 1800 nesting females per year (Pendoley et al, 2014). To determine the level of predation, remote camera traps were focused upon new nests shortly after laying to monitor nest predation during the incubation period until hatching. The numbers of eggs were counted prior to camera placement so

that survivorship comparison could be made between predated and undisturbed nests. A sand plot study to assess fox activity in the area was undertaken in conjunction with the camera traps. Due to severe cyclone activity in the area the study was discontinued 7 to 10 days prior to hatchling emergence however preliminary data for the incubation period was collected. Foxes were seen to dig into late term nests which were then scavenged upon over the next 48 hours by native and exotic animals. The activity of foxes captured by camera traps was seen to increase as the nesting season progressed indicating potential predation threat upon hatchlings and nests. These results indicate the need for further study to provide information on fox behaviour and the impacts upon marine turtle nesting activities.

Proceedings of the
Second Australian and Second Western Australian
Marine Turtle Symposia
Perth 25-27 August 2014



Department of
Parks and Wildlife

