ULTRASOUND STUDY OF REPRODUCTIVE STRUCTURES IN NESTING AUSTRALIAN FLATBACK SEA TURTLE, NATATOR DEPRESSUS

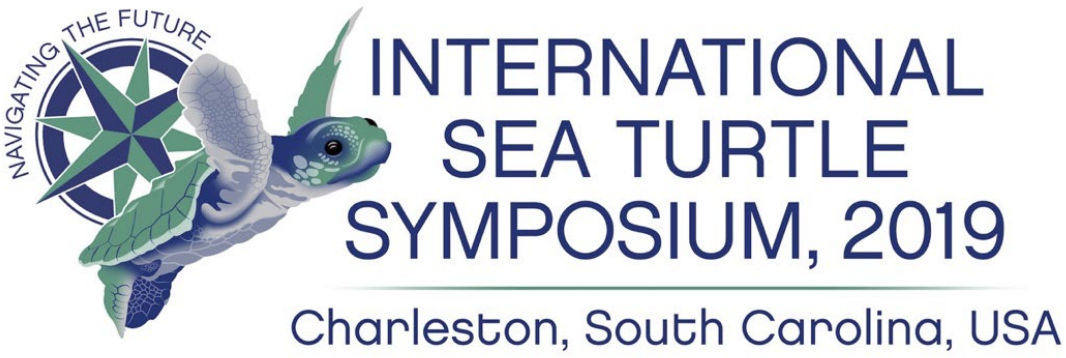
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The Flatback sea turtle, *Natator depressus*, is the least studied of all the sea turtles. It is found only in the waters of Australia and is considered phylogenetically one of the older extant sea turtles. We studied the reproductive structures using non-invasive ultrasound to determine ovarian follicle size and oviductal egg size and overall reproductive condition. Fifteen turtles were examined between Nov. 18th and 22nd, 2017 on Thevenard Island, Western Australia. In turtles that false crawled, we were able to identify oviductal eggs and collect egg size prior to nesting. During this period, 12 nesters displayed mature ovaries while 3 displayed partially depleted ovaries. Atretic follicles of various sizes were observed in several females. This was a pilot study to determine efficacy of the procedure as well as to collect data to compare with other sea turtle species. The Flatback sea turtle produces the largest ovulatory follicles of any Chelonidae.

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