

Turtle haven off Dampier

By KEITH MORRIS

The use of beaches in the Dampier Archipelago by marine turtles for nesting was one of the main reasons for these islands becoming Nature Reserves in 1980.

Presently 26 of the 40 islands within a 45km radius of Dampier are Nature Reserves, and four species of turtle have been recorded nesting on them.

These are the Green, Hawksbill, Flatback and Loggerhead Turtle.

The beaches are also used by the public from the towns of Dampier, Karratha, Wickham and Roebourne for recreational activities.

Since 1983 regular aerial counts of turtle tracks

on beaches have been undertaken to determine the extent of turtles and distribution of turtle nesting on the islands.

This work has been supported by ground surveys, and, as each species has its own characteristic track pattern, a species nesting distribution has also been determined.

The Green turtle is the most common in the Archipelago, and nests on most beaches.

The Loggerhead and Flatback turtles prefer

beaches on the limestone based islands nearer to deep water.

Between 400 and 600 female turtles come ashore each night to lay their eggs during the nesting season from September to April.

Most turtle nesting activity appears to occur during neap tides when there is less difference between high and low tides.

Up to 150 eggs at a time may be laid by a female turtle, and she may come ashore to lay

four to six times in a nesting season.

Turtle eggs require an incubation temperature of at least 24 degrees C before development will commence, and the sex of the hatchling is determined by the incubation temperature.

For the Green turtle, eggs incubated between 24 degrees and 27.5 degrees will develop into males, and between 28 and 31.5 degrees they develop into females.

This means that eggs laid early in the season will probably develop into males, while those laid later in the season will develop into females.

Incubation temperatures above 32 degrees C are usually lethal.

Some preliminary work on nest temperatures on Barrow Island and the Dampier Archipelago show that the incubation temperature for a particular nest remains relatively constant despite ground temperature ranges of 22 degrees to 40 degrees.

Much of the data obtained on turtle utilization of the islands will be used in the preparation of a Draft Management Plan for the Nature Reserves in the Dampier Archipelago.

Greenough region staff

GREENOUGH Region became staffed and operational on September 9 when Regional Manager Geoff Mercer started work.

Geoff comes to the Department from the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service and brings with him extensive experience of both marine and terrestrial park management.

He is stationed at Geraldton.

Kelly Gillan, District Manager Moora, joined us on September 2.

Kelly worked at the Forests Department's Dwellingup Research Station until 1979 when he left to take a post as biologist with Dampier Salt Ltd.

Kim Nardi swelled the ranks of Regional staff on September 16 when he started as Operations Officer, Geraldton.

Kim was formerly appointed to Carnarvon, but this was altered to Geraldton when the log-

istics of operations in the Gascoyne Region were reconsidered.

Kim's background is in marine research in WA.

Responsibility for Gascoyne Region will now be shared between Regional Managers Greenough (West Gascoyne) and Pibara (East Gascoyne).

Jeff and Kim's duties in the Gascoyne include working with Planning Officer Richard May in the development of Ningaloo Marine Park.

—PETER KIMBER