



Welcome to the second edition of the newsletter. Quite a bit has happened on the local turtling scene since the last edition.



TAGGING NEWS

Anna V has been to Rosemary Island three times since the last issue and has been very busy. She recorded around 190 turtles, 58 of which were remigrants (30%). One of the trips was a family affair (including twin baby grandsons). Once again, a great effort by Anna.



WEB PAGE

Tracie Fields and Helen Mills have been busy working on the web page. They have entered a lot of information and scanned photos, and it is looking very good. There is a little more to do to finalise it and they are hoping to get this done early in the New Year. However, it is available for people to see at www.karratha.com/~turtletag. Please have a look and let me know if you have any comments.



TURLING TRIPS

Two turtling trips have been run in the Dampier Archipelago over the last couple of months. The first was in mid-November to Norbill Bay on Rosemary Island. Five people travelled to the island on the CALM boat *Bidhangara*, with Geoff Kregor. A number of turtles were seen laying and investigating the beach.

A group of lucky year 6 students from Tambrey Primary School spent a weekend at Hawksbill Hut and a night searching the beaches and tagging turtles. A great time was had by all. Thanks to Warren Richards for assisting with this trip.

A third trip was planned for mid-December but had to be cancelled due to the presence of Cyclone Sam and the strong winds associated with him.



GREEN TURTLES DISAPPEARED

Numbers of Green turtles seen nesting this year are very low. No Greens have been tagged at Rosemary this year so far. Numbers are also very low in other places, for example on the western side of Barrow Island it is not unusual to see hundreds of turtles in the shallows and many females hauled out on the beach during the day. This year, we are seeing only very few tracks on these beaches. Low numbers of Green turtles are also being seen in Queensland.

One theory suggests that this is due to the effects of El Nino/La Nina and their influence on ocean currents. The Leeuwin Current, which runs down the WA coast, is affected by this phenomenon. This year the water seems to be warmer than usual, which can reduce the food availability for animals, and hence the numbers of turtles present in an area.



NEWS FROM OTHER PLACES

Munda

Peter Salinovich and Noel Grover spent two weeks in December tagging at Cowrie Beach on Mundabullangana station, about 50 km west of Port Hedland. This location is very important for nesting Flatback



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Turtles. They were trained by Roy Teale who also helped organise the trip. It was an extremely busy time, with nearly 420 turtles being tagged, with 151 (36%) being remigrants. Great work guys!

Our thanks to Munda station for assisting with accommodation and support, and to Roy Teale for his efforts. CALM's Regional Ecologist Peter Kendrick also spent a night assisting the taggers.

Exmouth region

North West Cape is home to many Green turtles during the nesting season, although is very quiet this year and no tagging has yet been carried out at this location.

The nearby Muiron Islands and Coral Bay support nesting Loggerhead turtles. A group of volunteer taggers are currently on the Muirons. Funding for this part of the tagging programme comes from Apache Energy. Many thanks to them.

While no tagging is done at Coral Bay, CALM volunteer Peter Mack was recently awarded a Coastcare Award for his work in protecting turtle nests from foraging foxes. Well done Peter.

Lowendals/Montes

Two taggers, sponsored by Apache Energy, are spending a couple of months, on Varanus Island. Varanus Island supports mostly Hawksbill turtles.

Apache are also assisting a PhD student who is looking at human impacts on turtles nesting on the Lowendals and nearby Montebello Islands, and regional importance of the area for nesting sea turtles. She is also planning to attach satellite tags to about 6 turtles and follow their movements. This should provide some very interesting information about what turtles do when they are not nesting.

Barrow Island

Barrow Island is a focus site for nesting Green and Flatback turtles. Greens nest on the western side of the island, while Flatbacks tend to prefer the more

sheltered eastern side. Volunteers are currently patrolling beaches on Barrow, searching for the elusive Green turtle. Thanks to Chevron Australia for supporting this programme.



GENETIC POPULATION MODELLING

Apache Energy is planning to do some genetic work on the turtle populations in WA. They would like to collect skin samples from turtles nesting at Exmouth, Lowendal & Montebello Islands, Rosemary Island, Indonesia and Queensland. These samples will be analysed for their DNA and will help to establish relationships between populations in these areas.

Turtle tagging volunteers may be asked to collect the skin samples (taken from the shoulder area or from dead hatchlings) and place them into a preservative in small vials. These will be sent to Canberra for DNA analysis. I'll keep you posted on the results of this programme in future editions.



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