



MARINE TURTLE RESEARCH PROJECT
ROSEMARY ISLAND

VOLUNTEERS NEWSLETTER
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The end of another busy turtle nesting season is fast approaching. Once again, a lot of important work has been carried out by you, the volunteers.



ROSEMARY ISLAND

A number of trips were made to Rosemary Island during the season. A total of 247 turtles were encountered, of which approximately 30% were remigrants. 167 (68%) were Hawksbills, 68 (27%) were Flatbacks but only 14 (5%) were Green turtles. Once again Green turtle numbers are down, perhaps a result of the much cooler weather we have been having (see also Jan 2001 issue).



NEWS FROM OTHER LOCATIONS

Varanus Island

Apache Energy has had Peter Salinovich and Pat Cullen based on Varanus Island, carrying out turtle tagging and assisting Kellie Pendoley with her research program. 107 turtles were encountered on the island, of which 80 (75%) were remigrants. 60 (56%) were Hawksbills and 47 (44%) were Flatbacks.

They also visited many of the surrounding islands in the Lowendal group and the Montebello Islands, to check on nesting activity.

Cowrie Beach, Munda Station

Once again Munda station provided excellent support for this part of the research program, by assisting with accommodation and food costs. In fact, the volunteers lived in luxury and didn't even have to cook their own meals! Thanks to Munda, particularly Kerry, the cook.

228 Flatbacks were encountered at Cowrie Beach this season, a drop in numbers from last year. However, tagging was done after Christmas this year, and turtle numbers were probably starting to drop off. 31% of these were remigrants.

Some media interest was generated this year, with ABC radio, ABC TV and GWN TV all running stories on the tagging effort at Munda. Volunteers Rick Manwaring, Melanie Powell, Simeon Taylor and Shane Brady did an excellent job of fielding their many questions, and got to be TV stars to boot! Well done guys!

Thanks also to Peter Salinovich and Michelle O'Mara for training these guys, and giving them such a good knowledge base to work from.

Barrow Island

Anna Vitenbergs, Bev Horton and Bob Young spent around 10 days on Barrow Island in January. They mainly concentrated on Green turtles at John Wayne beach, where numbers were again low with only 48 turtles being encountered. They also checked out the Flatbacks at Yacht Club beach. Albert de Groot, who works on the island, and some of the other field personnel also assisted with tagging at Yacht Club. A job well done by all, and thanks also to Chevron for their continued support of the program on Barrow Island.

Some of you may have seen a recent documentary on ABC television about Barrow Island that highlighted the importance of the people that work there in protecting the unique wildlife. It also showed what a special place Barrow Island is. All good news for the turtles.



PORT HEDLAND LIGHTS

More reports have been received this year of Flatback hatchlings on Cemetery Beach in Port Hedland becoming misoriented, and ending up on the street instead of making it to the ocean (see also May 2001 issue).

I visited the beach in January and February to assess the problem, and CALM is working with the Town of Port Hedland to address it.



SIGNS AT WICKHAM

Robe River Iron Ore has offered to fund some signs about turtles for the Port Walcott Yacht Club and adjacent Bell's (Back) Beach. This is a nesting site for Flatbacks, but as it is close to Wickham is also a good spot for people to watch the turtles.

In recent times, the community has become concerned that beach users were not aware of how to treat nesting turtles, and were also driving on the beach. It appears that it is mostly local people who use this beach.

The signs are modelled on those at Cemetery Beach in Port Hedland and include information on Flatback turtles, how to watch turtles without disturbing them, and a warning not to drive on the beach between October and April. They should be put up in late February. There is also an article in this month's Wickham Observer, and Robe have sent out information to all their employees.



TEDs SAVE PRAWN INDUSTRY DOLLARS

Recent work by CSIRO Marine Research has shown that Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) can reduce the number of large animals caught in prawn trawl nets by up to 95%. This lowers the number of prawns that are damaged during handling from being crushed by these large animals when the nets are emptied. An additional bonus was the reduction in risk to workers from handling large animals such as rays, sharks and turtles.

TEDs are metal grids placed inside the trawl net, which block the entry of larger sea-life, but allow prawns to pass through. They were made compulsory in 2000 in Australia's Northern Prawn Fishery. However, the research showed that only particular types of TEDs improved the catch, and some actually reduced prawn catch.

The use of TEDs is generally good news for the conservation of the larger species, including turtles, that can be caught by prawn trawlers.

For more information see
<http://www.marine.csiro.au/PressReleases/folder/01releases/11oct01.html>.



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