



Well its been a busy turtling season yet again. My thanks to all the volunteers who assisted with the program this season. We couldn't have done it without you!



TAGGING SITES

Barrow Island

261 Green turtles, 2 Flatbacks and 1 Hawksbill were encountered, with 22 remigrants (all greens). This work was done by Anna Vitenbergs and Bev Horton. They observed both Golden Bandicoots (at night) and Perenties (during the day) digging up nests for eggs. This season was a very busy one for Green turtles, with hundreds being seen aggregating in the waters off Turtle Bay and John Wayne Beach in October during Col Limpus' visit. Anna and Bev also scouted out other beaches on the island during the day for turtle activity. They also counted Flatback tracks on Yacht Club Beach, to get an indication of nesting numbers. Flatbacks were also encountered on Yacht Cub Beach on the eastern side of the island, and most of this work was carried out by people who work on the island, and ably organised by Alby de Groot. Thanks to ChevronTexaco for again supporting the turtle work on Barrow Island.

Varanus Island

Once again Apache Energy has supported the turtle program on Varanus Island, with Peter Salinovich and Pat Cullen spending many weeks searching beaches for turtles. Well done.

Munda

134 Flatbacks were encountered at Cowrie Beach on Munda station, with 44 being remigrants. Geoff, Warren Richards and Steve Cable spent a few nights on the beach before Christmas, followed by Roy

Teale, Greg Harold, Karen Edwards, Peter Kendrick, Robyn Bowles and Kate Fisher after Christmas. Our thanks go to the station, particularly Kerry and Dave, for their support of the project.

Rosemary Island

54 turtles were encountered on Rosemary Island this season, 42 Hawksbills, 4 Greens and 8 Flatbacks. Most of this work was carried out by Anna and Warren, again a sterling effort on their behalves, with assistance from Bev Horton and Sue McDonald. Thanks to Woodside for sponsoring this part of the project.



DAMPIER ARCHIPELAGO INVENTORY SURVEY

A number of trips were undertaken in the Dampier Archipelago this season, to find out more about which species of turtle are nesting on which beaches. Visits were done to Enderby Island, Angel Island and Malus Island at different times during the season. Volunteers ably assisted Geoff Kregor with identification of tracks, and assessing numbers of turtles using particular beaches.

We have confirmed that Hawksbill turtles use beaches on the south side of Enderby Island, but do not appear to favour those on the northern side of the island. Both Hawksbills and Greens are nesting in Marney Bay on Malus Island and also on beaches on the eastern end of this island.





INVENTORY SURVEY, ISLANDS BETWEEN ONSLOW AND DAMPIER

Tap Oil sponsored a trip to visit islands between Onslow and Dampier to assess their importance for nesting turtles. Kellie Pendoley walked around all the islands and recorded evidence of nesting on each one. Many of the islands appear to be used by Hawksbill turtles, with some appearing to be of fairly high importance on a regional scale. Vicki Long also attended the trip and vastly improved our knowledge of the vegetation of the islands. I collected information about bird breeding and other animal records. It is hoped this information will be published in 2003. Thanks to Tap Oil, and Tara for her excellent assistance.



CLEAN (CAPE LAMBERT ECO-ACTION NETWORK) MONITOR BELLS BEACH

A new group has been set up in Wickham, called CLEAN (Cape Lambert Eco-Action Network). The group was the brainchild of Angela Hartnett, who was lucky enough to go on an Earthwatch trip to Malaysia earlier in 2002, to assist with Green turtle research. Her interest in turtles was ignited and she then contacted CALM to see what was happening here.

CLEAN are monitoring Bells Beach for usage by turtles. The beach lies between the Port Walcott Yacht Club and the port facilities at Cape Lambert. It is a popular spot for locals, for fishing and picnicking, but many people have been driving their vehicles on the beach. Signs have been put up at the beach and at the entrance to the track that leads to the beach, to inform the public about the best ways to watch turtles and why they shouldn't drive on the beach during turtle season. Despite our best efforts some people still insisted on

taking their vehicles onto the beach, and so Robe have put a rock barrier across the track to reinforce the message.

CLEAN volunteers are counting turtle tracks on the beach each day, in order to obtain an estimate of the number of turtles using this beach. We think that only Flatbacks nest here, but it is also possible that Greens use the beach. Volunteers also spend some time at night at the beach observing the turtles, and keeping an eye out for tagged animals. They are conducting egg counts, and collecting information about vehicle usage of the beach, and predation of the nests by foxes or goannas. It is also planned to collect information about whether the hatchlings are being impacted by lights at Cape Lambert, which are visible at the eastern end of the beach.

The efforts put in by CLEAN volunteers will provide some very useful information about the turtles on Bells Beach, hopefully for many years to come.



VISIT BY DR COL LIMPUS, QUEENSLAND TURTLE EXPERT

Dr Col Limpus visited WA in October 2002 to carry out an external review of the marine turtle program in this state. He visited Shark Bay, Exmouth, Karratha, Dampier Archipelago and Munda station, and flew over islands including the Muirons, Barrow I, Montebellos, Varanus Island and the Dampier Archipelago, to get a feel for turtle usage of these area. He also spoke to CALM staff and some volunteers about the current program.

Dr Limpus also gave public seminars in Karratha, Exmouth and Perth. The one in Karratha was well attended and very interesting.



His review was completed in late 2002, and his recommendations will be considered by the Department. A number of recommendations have been made, covering research and management. There may be some changes to the way we monitor marine turtles in WA next season. However, any changes that are made will ensure the continued input from volunteers, and will improve our knowledge about marine turtles in WA.



CONTACTS

Fran Stanley

Reserves Management Officer,
CALM, Karratha
9143 1488
frans@calm.wa.gov.au

Geoff Kregor

Ranger-In-Charge, Dampier Archipelago,
CALM, Karratha
9143 1488
geoffk@calm.wa.gov.au

LIGHTS AT CEMETERY BEACH

Flatback turtles nesting and hatching on Cemetery Beach in Port Hedland are still being impacted by lights behind the beach. CALM is working with the Town of Port Hedland and the Mercure Inn to try and make some change to the lighting, to reduce impacts on turtles. Hatchlings are particularly susceptible to interference from lights, and can become misoriented, moving away from the ocean instead of towards it. The hatchlings are then more prone to predation or death from exhaustion or dehydration.



FUTURE NEWS STORIES

Freelance journalist, Rochelle Mutton, and photographer, Margie Nicholas, visited the Pilbara in mid December to gather information and take photographs for news stories about turtles. The information gathered will be put into a story for Landscape magazine and articles for the West Australian Newspaper. Keep an eye out!