

Project Update: December 2005

The first three weeks of fieldwork on the studied 5.75 km section of leatherback nesting beach in the Gamba Complex is going well. Having seen a decline in nesting leatherbacks over the last three years (576 nests in 2002/2003, 207 nests in 2003/2004 and 128 nests in 2004/2005), the numbers of nests so far this season promise a good year with the projection of more nests than in 2002/2003. The differences in numbers between years reflect the natural fluctuations in sea turtle populations due to individual females nesting only every two to three years. The high numbers this year have provided excellent field conditions for marking experimental nests, and temperature sensors have been placed in 22 leatherbacks nests. The first leatherback nests of the season are due to begin hatching in the next few weeks having been laid approximately 65 days ago (average incubation period for leatherback eggs), when the collection of data on the nest environment and hatching success will start.

The seven Gabonese turtle team members have been trained in the experimental nest set-up, and are soon to begin training for nest excavation and data collection.