

Sea Turtles Forever



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Progress Report - February 2016

Mid season report from Punta Pargos Green Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) Monitoring and Protection Program

1. Educational program:

The Sea Turtles Forever educational program was once again a success during the 2015/2016 season thanks to the support of The Rufford Foundation. We changed our strategy for this year's presentations a bit by having a Costa Rican patrol leader run the presentation. In the past Project Director Marc Ward gave the presentations to 5-7 of the schools in and around the Punta Pargos area. We made the decision to have a Costa Rican presenter this season because we felt that the connection to Costa Rican youth would be stronger when the presentation was done by a local Costa Rican who many of the children knew.

Dominic Rosales Ordonez (now 21) grew up on one of the project beaches, and has been a volunteer or paid staff patroller for eight years. He gave presentations to seven elementary schools this season, teaching the area's youth about the need for marine turtle conservation and protection, the importance of sea turtles for fishing success, the threat of extinction, and also what his job as a marine turtle monitor entailed. Presentations were given at Los Pargos, Rio Seco, Junquillal, 27th de Abril, Pinella, Paraiso and Santa Cruz schools. This program is vital to stopping the culturally imbedded practice of illegal egg harvest, providing these youth with the knowledge they need to make responsible decisions about wildlife and the environment. Dominic was an exceptional presenter, and made a very lasting connection to the local youth.

2. Protection Patrols:

Marine turtle monitoring and protection on Punta Pargos for the 2015/2016 season has been successful at deterring the illegal harvest of turtles and eggs from the area. Even though our patrols occur nightly to defend the nesting area from poachers and collect important data on nesting activities, the region has had a significant reduction in nesting and subsequent hatchling production this season. This could be connected to the most extreme El Nino conditions ever

recorded in the Eastern Pacific. Although there have been fluctuations in nesting productivity from year to year, this season has had the largest reduction in nesting recorded over the last decade or more. Punta Pargos nest counts are down by 41%.

To the North of Punta Pargos we collaborate with Dr. Bibi Santidrian Tomillo of The Leatherback Trust who is reporting a 75.3% reduction in green turtle nesting for the Cabuyal area. Last season they had 93 nesting green turtles, but this season they have 23. To the south of Punta Pargos, we are collaborating with Luis Fonseca who is reporting a 71% reduction in nesting green turtles for his area. Last season they had 466 nesting green turtles, this season they have 134. These project leaders also suspect that the low activity is connected to the extreme El Niño conditions in the Eastern Pacific this year. More investigation is necessary.

Punta Pargos production numbers

<u>Activity</u>	<u>per 2015- 16 (23wks to 15 Feb)</u>	<u>2014-15 season (23wks)</u>	<u>% change</u>	<u>+ / -</u>
Nests secured from poaching =	59	100	41%	drop
Eggs secured from poaching =	3,627	5,821	38%	drop
Green turtle eggs =	3,090	5,027	39%	drop
Olive Ridley eggs =	437	795	45%	drop
Hawksbill eggs =	100	0	total	rise
Hatchlings released to date =	1,466	2,425	40%	drop
Nests lost to illegal harvest (poached) =	3	10	69%	drop
Number of nights patrolled =	127	141	10%	drop

Nightly patrols started September 24, 2015, except for full moon nights. Our data show that in over ten years of patrol, green turtles have nested only three times on full moon nights. So, we take this night off every month for our team to get a much needed break from the exhausting nightly high-tide schedule (with start times that vary each night depending on the high tide).

3. Nesting Habitat Clean-ups

We sponsored three beach clean-ups this year on turtle nesting beaches in the project area. These cleanups involved local residents and youth, and provided a way for the community to support sea turtle conservation. About 110 pounds of marine plastic debris and other litter was removed from sea turtle nesting areas.