

Project Update: January 2017

In October and November 2016, I accompanied Dr Monica Lara (team member) on capture – tag – release trips within the Archipelago Espiritu Santo National Park (PNAES, acronym in Spanish) using a combination of RSG Booster grant funds and matching funds from the Mexican Endangered Species Program (PROCER). Captured turtles were immediately brought on board, epibionts and parasites removed, then the turtle is measured, weighed, and tagged with metal flipper tags donated by The Leatherback Trust. Dr Monica Lara is also taking blood samples to test for the chelonia herpes virus, toxins, and dissolved metals. I collected barnacles for my graduate research programme on stable isotopes to determine where these turtles have been feeding and residing during the life of the attached barnacle.



While Dr Monica continues capture surveys with the Mexican government, I am focusing more on passive, non-invasive in-water snorkel monitoring surveys using camera identification techniques. During my monthly trips, I take local students and resident sailboaters on snorkel/beach monitoring surveys. We have identified several different turtles with GoPro cameras and extension poles to get close to document unique markings and barnacle composition (Photo). Carla Sanchez has been developing our outreach campaign

and we have completed four workshops with over 80 people total in attendance. The Mexican Federal Environmental Protection Agency and the Commission for Protected Areas attended and gave us their full support and encouragement to continue offering workshops (Photo). Carla is currently working with the director of both departments to obtain an official letter of support.

Through our outreach campaign, we have recruited several volunteer sailboaters and residents who are very active on the VHF radio providing information about reporting sea turtle sightings through our Citizen Science Program, “Sea Turtle Spotter” which



was originally funded by Oceanic Society and PacSafe Travel Gear. We also have volunteers helping with fundraising, website revamping, and snorkel and beach dune monitoring surveys in various communities: El Sargento, La Ventana, Todos Santos, and El Cajete. We have collected over 10 hours of video that now need editing and processing, and we have some potential volunteers to help us using GoPro Studio and Photoshop.

Through VFH Radio and online reporting, we were made aware of 12 stranded turtles in the El Cajete community. I took residents and students to conduct external examinations and collect tissue samples for isotope analysis to help determine where the sea turtles were alive last (Photo). We are continuing our conservation tourism programme with the ASUPMATOMA nest monitoring camp in Los Cabos and are currently working with Colorado State University in several biology programmes at the camp.