

Project Update: February 2019

In January 2019, we hosted Colorado State University at the La Duna Ecology Center, our remote basecamp for research and outreach workshops. We hosted two groups totaling 34 students, most studying biology with others studying sustainability, ecosystem management, and human dimensions. During the groups, the students helped us develop a protocol for quantifying plastics in sea turtle foraging habitat. They helped process another rare stranded loggerhead, the fourth loggerhead we have registered stranded in La Paz bay, and registered marine algae and invertebrates in the intertidal area that are potentially food sources for sea turtles.

After the CSU groups, I traveled to Sinaloa. There I met with Dr Alan Zavala, several members on his team and several fishermen who are working with him as informants on poachers. The head fishermen took me to a beach where sea turtles are brought to be killed and salted for their meat to be later sold on the black market (Photo 1). They told me that sea turtles are usually caught in shrimp, fish, and shark nets during legal fishing seasons and there are over 2000 small-scale boats just in one small bay of Costa Azul (Photo 2). Fishermen who participated with Dr Zavata collect biometric data and released the sea turtles unless they were stressed and needed rehabilitation, then the fishermen brought the sea turtles into the rescue centre (Photo 3). Yet, many fishermen took the sea turtles to sell on the black market. They say the problem is increasing. I am currently working with Dr Zavata on a proposal for a PhD programme relating to this problem.



Photo 1. Screenshot of a video taken during the explanation of how poachers kill and salt sea turtles for the black market. The fishermen explaining the process is the informant for this area and a former poacher. The video from which this screenshot was saved will be a part of the documentary, "Legend of the Caguama", sharing the unique history of sea turtles as they have transitioned from daily food source to black market high dollar items to icons of conservation.



Photo 2. A fraction of the small-scale shrimp boats in Costa Azul, Sinaloa. This is where fishermen Abelino Angulo fishes and now as the Director for Ecology, he works directly with fishermen to get them to report and rescue sea turtles caught in the fish nets. We have long-term plans to help him create a sustainable shrimp seafood company that we can promote to high-end tourism restaurant chains.



Photo 3. Critically endangered hawksbill turtle that was brought in for rescue and rehabilitation by shrimpers participating in the conservation programme with Dr Zavata in Sinaloa.