

Project Update: June 2023

We have had two field trips to the southwest Gulf of California, Mexico. In total, we captured 30 live hawksbills and found 10 stuffed hawksbills. The majority of the individuals (77%) were identified as juveniles with a mean curved carapace length of 48.8 ± 10 cm and a mean weight of 13.9 ± 7 kg. The remaining 16 individuals were identified as adults, three males and 13 females, with a mean curved carapace length of 74.3 ± 15.5 cm and a mean weight of 48.8 ± 20 kg.

In total, we have 70 tissue samples belonging to 70 individuals. Of these, 54 samples correspond to the individuals we captured in the two field trips, 19 to field trips between 2017 and 2020, 10 to stuffed individuals we found during the interviews, and 11 collected by the non-profit Grupo Tortuguero de las Californias A.C. between 2021 and 2023. These samples will be analysed during June and July 2023.

We did 17 formal and six informal interviews with fishers from five communities on the east coast of Baja California Sur, Mexico. We identified sites where hawksbills used to be caught and sites where fishers currently see hawksbill sea turtles. Some of the sites where hawksbills were caught when the trade was legal haven't had hawksbill records in recent years. Fishers confirmed that during the '70s and '80s hawksbills were larger (more than 55 kg) than the ones we see nowadays which are usually juveniles. Fishers also mentioned that hawksbill tortoiseshell was mainly used for handicrafts, jewelry, and to have stuffed individuals in their houses since it was a species difficult to catch due to their low numbers with respect to other sea turtle species.

Finally, we deployed two satellite transmitters (SPOT-375B, Wildlife Computers) on two adult hawksbill females caught in the foraging ground of Isla San José, México. To date, they have transmitted 481 and 4,107 messages and have sent information for more than 100 days.

The compiled information from the fisher's interviews, the captured hawksbill individuals and the satellite tagged individuals is giving us a better understanding of the relationship of this species with human communities and of the ecology of the species in the Gulf of California. Interestingly, hawksbills have been found more frequently on islands which highlights the relevance of these ecosystems for the maintenance of the species in the long-term.







