

Project Update: April 2009

Objectives:

- Personal talks with fisherman and poachers – Partially achieved

During the 2008 turtle season project staff and volunteers had frequent dialogue with fisherman and poachers involved in the extraction of turtle eggs.

- Turtle Festival – Not achieved

The yearly turtle festival takes place at the end of July and by the time the fund came in it was too late to coordinate our participation.

- 300 Community members and schoolchildren receive workshops on environmental conservation and turtle protection – partially achieved

They received a short presentation on marine turtles after which we walked the beach explaining into detail the importance of turtle control on the beach. Each participant was given a plastic bag to recollect garbage on the beach to reduce the risk of waste to the female turtles.

- 15 Local Tourist guides received training on marine turtles – Partially achieved

The purpose of this activity is to generate awareness amongst tourist on turtle protection and provide them with information on the small measures tourist can take during their stay in the Tayrona Park. As being part of the community the tourist guides also started to dialogue with their neighbours on the importance of biodiversity conservation and turtle protection in specific.

- Control activities during the 2008 Turtle Season – Not achieved

Project staff with the support of the local tourist guides, university students and tourist volunteers patrolled the Castilletes, beach one of the beaches most visited by marine turtles in the Tayrona Park.

- 2 Turtle nests protected – Partially achieved

This year only 15 nests of marine turtles have been reported in the Tayrona Park, 3 of which at the Castilletes beach. Unfortunately out of one of the nests no turtles were born. In total 232 turtles were born on Castilletes beach.

- Nest Protection – Partially achieved

Every morning and afternoon the nests were revised. Plants approaching the nests were taken away, also the underground roots as they can damage the turtle eggs. A wooden fence was built around the nests to protect them from being stepped upon by tourists.

Difficulties:

The first turtles born at the beach that we controlled during the 2008 turtle season were taken away by the Park Unit and a local University for exhibition at an aquarium in Santa Marta.

We started the project in close collaboration complementing each other's activities related to the protection of the marine turtles during the 2008 season. In a meeting with the Park Director we defined the procedure at the moment of the disclosure of the nest. As the Park Unit and the Local Park Rangers are responsible for the conservation of flora and fauna in the Tayrona Park we had to advise a local Park Ranger who would accompany us in protecting the little turtles on their way to the sea. Unfortunately, when the turtles were born at Castilletes beach, some park officials and staff

of the Local University placed the turtles in boxes, against the complaints of the Park Ranger present and definitely against our will.

It seemed that the Local University had not been able to find marine turtles for their aquarium and the Park Director offered them the baby turtles of our project without consulting with us, and without the necessary permission for the capture and transport of endangered fauna.

Two weeks after the capture of the small sea turtles the official permit (from Bogota) had not been released and the Local University was summoned to release the turtles immediately. No monitoring has been done by the University on whether the small turtles suffered any negative effects of being retained two weeks before released to the sea.

We have send complaint letters to the Bogota Office of the Colombian Park Service. A month ago the last letter has been send, but no response until now.

After this event we ended our collaboration with the Park Unit and decided to redirect our project in 2009 to a private beach visited by marine turtles outside the Park borders, as we lost the belief in the goodwill of the Park Unit to the real protection of sea turtles.

Outcomes so far:

A group of tourist guide, associated with the Posadas Ecoturísticas, a community tourism initiative, has embraced the turtle protection project, they visit local schools and community meeting to raise awareness on the topic. During the 2009 turtle season they will organise, together with the F.C.V, workshops at the local schools around the Tayrona Park, and environmental walks for the older children to the turtle beaches where we will have clean-up activities before the start of the turtle season.

Even do we still have several months of hard work, the Association de Posadas Ecoturísticas has embraced the project as their future flagship project with their community. They want to expand the project to other species, including the Iguana, Macaw, Tamarin monkeys etc.