

Environmental Education Activities

During February we were invited to participate in the environmental education fair “Cuidemos la Costa”, organized by JICOSUR, Careyes Foundation and the La Huerta County city hall. We received over 200 children and teenagers from the surrounding communities, ages 6-18, we talked to them about Hawkbill’s Network, the importance of sea turtles in their habitat as well as the importance of taking care of the environment (Fig. 1a-c)



Figure 1a-c: Red Carey Jalisco-Nayarit’s Director Farid Zavala and co-director Luis Ángel Tello, chatting with students during education fair “Cuidemos la Costa”

In April, we celebrated Earth Day by participating in the “Environmental Rally 2.0”, along with other environmental oriented organizations from the region. We received about 60 children from the surrounding communities, ages 8-12. At our station, the kids learned how to properly identify sea turtle species, as well as how to measure curved and straight carapace length. The 3rd place winners got the opportunity to name a turtle from our study and to see how the whole measuring, tagging and data collection process is, as well as getting stickers from our project and an adoption certificate (Fig. 2a-c).



Figure 2a-c: a) Luis Ángel Tello, teaching a participating team how to correctly identify a sea turtle; b) Farid Zavala explaining how to correctly measure straight and curved carapace length of sea turtles; c) participating children from local communities.

Public Releases and Project Dissemination Activities

Through the duration of the project, one of our main goals has been community participation, every turtle captured is released immediately after measured and tagged in the beach closest to their original capture site. Whenever there is people present, we let them join us, not before giving a brief explanation about the turtle's biology and the reasoning of our work. So far we, we have had the participation of +1000 locals, national and international tourists of all ages (Fig. 3-4)



Figure 3: Director Farid Zavala during public sea turtle release, giving a brief explanation about Hawksbill sea turtles and work being done by the network.

We have also kept on doing the dissemination of our work through social media, but most important, by having our information both at the town plaza on weekends, where locals and tourists can see our turtle carapace exhibitions, ask questions and get information about sea turtle conservation work that is being done in the region. So far we have received +500 people of all ages.



Figure 4: Zague, the first adult hawksbill male caught during our project, going back into the water.

Meeting with Local Authorities, Fishers and Other Stakeholders

In early April, we met with La Huerta County's mayor, we had been introduced to him in January during the "Fisherman's Festival" in Punta Pérula. During the meeting, we chatted about the work we are doing in the region, as well as reaffirming and strengthening environmental education and species conservation commitments. After our chat, the mayor agreed a monthly support to carry out the Hawksbill's network operability (Fig. 5).



Figure 5: Director Farid Zavala, with La Huerta County's Mayor, Miguel Arias, after meeting to discuss future collaborations in the region.

We also gathered with the fishers for updates and follow up training due to the upcoming hawksbill nesting season, we discussed proper handling techniques and the correct protocol to follow during captures, to avoid damaging gravid females. During the meeting we also had the presence of local authorities (CONANP) and representatives of local organizations whom we collaborate with (Careyes Foundation) (Fig. 6)

During the meeting we also gathered signatures and paperwork for the creation of an environmental surveillance committee through the Federal Bureau of Environmental Protection (PROFEPA), whom will grant the fishers with a badge that will distinguish them from other fishers and allow them to properly work with turtles without having problem with the competent authorities,



Figure 6: Meeting with Careyes Fishermen for updates and discussion of proper sea turtle handling techniques.

In Water Monitoring Activities, Scouting

During diurnal and nocturnal in-water monitoring, from February to June we have registered 29 new individuals (TOTAL:48) (Fig. 7a-d)., as well as 6 tagged turtle sightings and the unfortunate report of stranded dead turtle, which had been previously tagged, which was buried to recover skull and humorous bones for age determination studies (Fig. 8).

With the upcoming nesting season, we also scouted beaches around the Chamela Bay area (Jaibas, Las Alamandas, Mezcales, Caleta Blanca), where no sea turtle nest conservation is currently taking place. As the access to this beaches is private, we met with the person in charge of the houses located in the beaches to get information on nesting activities during the season. According to obtained results, we will start future nest conservation activities in the area, potentially protecting Hawksbill, Pacific Green, Olive Ridley and Leatherback nests.



Figure 7: Divers a) José Gómez; b) Ulices González; c) Marcelino Aguilar; d) Cesar Juárez, with hawksbill turtles caught during their commercial fishing activities for octopus, lobster and oyster.



Figure 8: Dead stranded hawksbill turtle buried to recover skull and bones for age determination studies.

Community Engagement Success Stories

During the period of this second update, we had what we considered two of our greatest achievements. First, during our participation in the “Cuidemos la Costa” fair, we met Vania Rodriguez, a 17-year-old high school student and soon to be college student. She approached us with curiosity and concerns about studying biology. After chatting for some time and getting answers to her concerns, she was convinced of her choice and inspired to follow her dreams. We have now taken her under our wing and joins the team during monitoring and environmental education events. We are sure she will become an amazing conservationist and a leader for her community.

Other special achievement, was the participation of Leonel Rodriguez, a 9-year-old kid, from the community of Punta Pérula, son of one of the fishers who actively participates in turtle captures. Leonel was always curious and assisted to meetings with his dad. We would see him at the beach during our public releases. So one day we invited him to join us and now he assists us during turtle measuring, tagging and releasing. He now explains our work to people who curiously approach us. And has claimed he wants to be a biologist and save turtles when he grows up. We have no doubt his strong character, love for the ocean and his determination, will make him a great conservationist (Fig. 9).



Figure 9: Future conservationist Leonel Gómez, assisting the team during turtle releases