

Latin American Sea Turtles In Partnership with WIDECAST Latin-American Program



News Bulletin June 2014

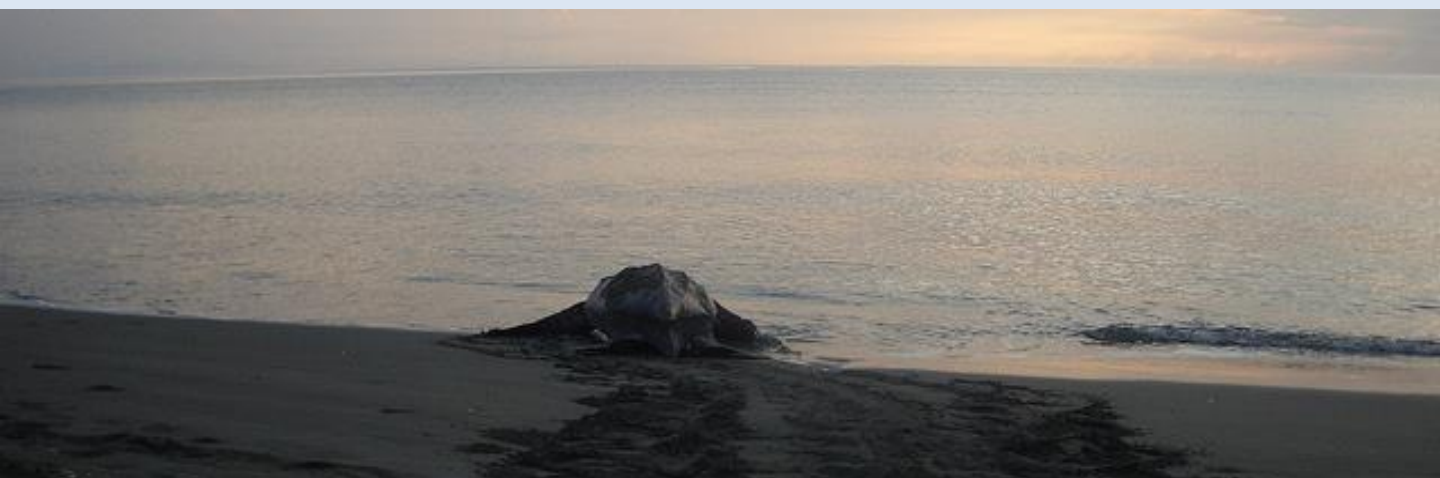
After facing a very challenging 2013 year, we would like to thank our LAST/WIDECAST family for their enormous support which has enabled us to continue with our vision in 2014, where all inhabitants of the Latin American –

Caribbean and Pacific – Region, human and sea turtle alike, can live together in balance; where healthy populations of sea turtles fulfill their ecological roles and economic potential; and critical natural habitats are sustainably managed!

2014 is off to a great start and we look forward to sharing with you our conservation efforts for sea turtles in Costa Rica and beyond, which have had a LASTing impact at the local, national and international level.

A quick glance of the exciting updates you will read about in this issue:

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34TH ANNUAL SEA TURTLE SYMPOSIUM



2014 INTERNATIONAL

SEA TURTLE SYMPOSIUM

NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA, USA

10-17 APRIL 2014



This April, members of LAST/WIDECAS^T attended the **34th annual International Sea Turtle Symposium** held in New Orleans, Louisiana. This conference brings together the world's leading scientists and researchers to share data, present work and to discuss the next importance steps for global marine turtle conservation.

Hundreds of projects presented the latest research in sea turtle anatomy, physiology and health, nesting, in-water and population biology, genetics, fisheries and threats.

LAST/WIDECAS^T attended the 20th Meeting of **Latin American Sea Turtle Specialists (RETOMALA)**, which focused on the on the conservation and biology of the hawksbill turtle in the region, economic sustainability of projects, and since the tragic incident of the death of a fellow sea turtle conservationist Jairo Mora en Costa Rica, a session on how to plan for a safe future of those working in sea turtle conservation was held.

LAST/WIDECAS^T is a partner of the **Eastern Pacific Hawksbill Initiative (ICAPO)**, which also held its annual meeting prior to the symposium. Protection of hawksbills in the eastern Pacific is among the world's most pressing sea turtle conservation issues; only a few hundred female hawksbills are estimated to nest along the entire region's coastline. The low nesting numbers suggest that the species is unlikely to survive without these coordinated conservation actions to which we are a part of!

The LAST/WIDECAS^T director met with **SEE Turtles**, a non-profit project that supports sea turtle conservation through travel and education and discussed their initiative, **Billion Baby Turtles**. For every dollar raised, at least one hatchling will be saved by helping Latin American organizations pay for their teams to protect important nesting beaches and build hatcheries. Their goal is to fill the oceans with turtle hatchlings, raising the odds for sea turtle survival!

OSA IN-WATER PROJECT

SEA TURTLE MONITORING AT PLAYA BLANCA, COSTA RICA

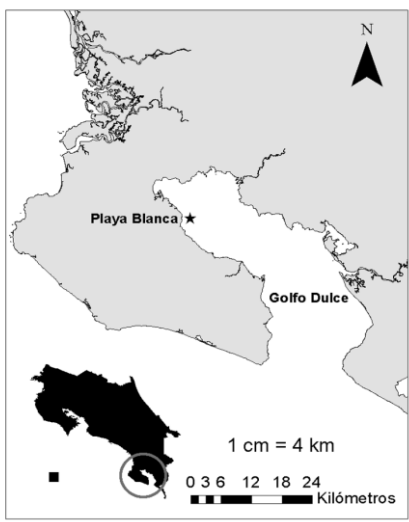
Thanks to support from **Conservation International**, sea turtles were monitored at Playa Blanca, Costa Rica from December of 2012 to February of 2014. This support afforded LAST/WIDECAS with the opportunity to continue its unique conservation efforts to monitor juvenile and adult male turtles in their natural habitat, **in water**, in Costa Rica's Golfo Dulce.

Since the project began in 2010, a total of **461 turtles have been caught** with nets, **377 were green turtles** (*Chelonia mydas*) and **84 were hawksbills** (*Eretmochelys imbricata*). 76% of green turtles caught were adults and the rest juveniles. However, 26% of the hawksbill turtles caught were adults and the rest were juveniles.

Our results show that **Golfo Dulce is a very important feeding site for juvenile and adult hawksbills and green sea turtles**. This population makes Golfo Dulce a site for international concern and conservation, since the adults caught are coming from nesting beaches in Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia and Ecuador. Therefore, multi-lateral agreements are needed to provide adequate protection for their recovery. LAST/WIDECAS will continue this project and their efforts to protect and conserve the Golfo Dulce ecosystem.

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM AT PLAYA BLANCA, COSTA RICA

The Osa-In Water program at Playa Blanca would not have been possible without the participation of numerous individuals in the volunteer program supported by Conservation International. Since it began in December of 2012, **34 individuals from the local communities** have participated by hosting volunteers, organizing activities and/or participating in workshops on socioeconomic alternatives. 40 participants attended the two arts and crafts workshops and one workshop on how to manage volunteer groups. Over **400 international volunteers** have been received, providing significant income to the area. This project is continuously being evaluated and has received some very positive feedback!



OSA IN-WATER PROJECT



IN-WATER MONITORING

Thanks to the hard efforts of our research team and volunteers, we have captured and collected data on a total of 58 turtles, **43 green and 15 hawksbill turtles** so far this season!

The data collected supports previous theories that the green turtle population is comprised of mostly adult individuals utilizing the Gulf as an inter-migratory feeding ground whereas hawksbills tend to reside in the bay for longer periods. A similar number of adult and juvenile hawksbills were found thus suggesting mature adult hawksbills may also be utilizing the bay in a similar way to the green turtles.

REFORESTATION PROJECT

RA's, volunteers and students have been hard at work collecting *Rhizophora mangle* propagules. To date **2,300 propagules** have been planted and are being successfully raised in our nursery.

Once they reach a certain size, the mangrove trees are transplanted to their final destination where their growth (height and number of leaves) and success are monitored. However, the **183 mangrove trees** planted so far have shown limited growth.

We are currently experimenting with new planting techniques to improve conditions to offer them the best chance at success.



OSA IN-WATER PROJECT



SEA GRASS MONITORING

We have continued with our sea grass monitoring project, a first of its kind here in Costa Rica.

We are currently monitoring 30 fixed transects that are further divided into quadrants where we take random samples to study the species present and count the number of leaves on each species.

These studies will provide us with very important information on one of the most bio diverse ecosystems on the planet and extremely important to the health and reproduction of sea turtles.

We look forward to sharing our results at the end of the season!

SEA TURTLE RESCUE AND REHABILITATION CENTER

We are pleased to announce that we have not had any mass mortality events so far this year. This may be due to our efforts on our national campaign “**Yes to sustainable fishing**” and working with local fishermen on the use of more sustainable fishing practices and proper techniques to release incidentally caught turtles.

That said, our Rescue Center has received nine hawksbill turtles so far this year. The majority were treated with freshwater to remove the burrowing barnacles *Stephanolepas muricata*. All animals were treated and released back at sea!



We would like to thank **Broadreach** for their generous donation of an industrial freezer that will help our rescue and rehabilitation center immensely by conserving important samples for our research.

BINATIONAL PROJECT



So far we have protected 153 leatherback, 21 hawksbill and 1 green nests!

CAHUITA NATIONAL PARK, COSTA RICA

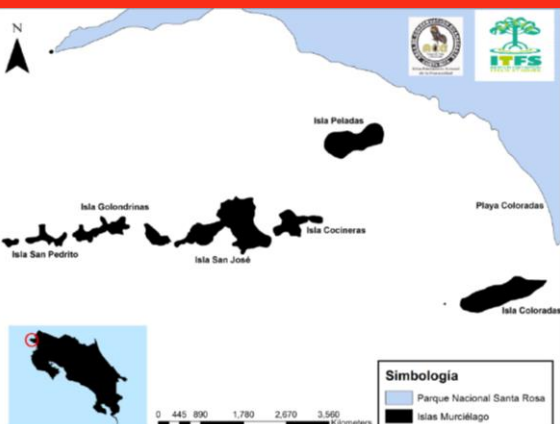
Since 2001, LAST/WIDECAST and the Costa Rican government have been monitoring and protecting this important Caribbean nesting site for 3 species, the hawksbill, green and leatherback sea turtles. Thanks to these long term and consistent monitoring efforts, this site has been recognized by the Inter-American Sea Turtle Convention as the **only index nesting beach for hawksbill turtles in Costa Rica**. Index beaches are critical to sea turtle conservation and the data collected will be used to generate information to help understand the status of the hawksbill populations in the region.

SAN SAN BEACH, PANAMA

Since 2000, our partner organization AAMVECONA has been monitoring and protecting the natural resources in the San San Pond Sak Wetland along the Caribbean Coast of Panama, including leatherback turtles. This project is done in partnership with USAID. Thanks to their efforts a total of **83 leatherback nests** were protected from poachers this season!



SAN JOSE ISLAND, MURCIELAGO ISLANDS ARCHIPELAGO, COSTA RICA



This beach is monitored by our partners Luis Fonseca and Wagner Quiros. Reporting over **1317 green sea turtle nests**, it too has been recognized by the Inter-American Sea Turtle Convention as one of the most important nesting sites for this species in the Pacific.



PACUARE PROJECT



BEACH MONITORING

With just over **100 leatherback nests** on the beach this season, it was low compared to other seasons. However, low numbers have also been reported at other leatherback nesting sites along the Caribbean Coast of Costa Rica. In addition, despite our continuous protection efforts over 50% of these leatherback nests were lost to the hands of poachers. We are proud to mention we have trained several new local research assistants to assist us in this enormous task.

It is now more than ever important to step-up our conservation efforts for this critically endangered animal and reach out to all of you for your help. If you are interested in helping please do not hesitate to contact us!

Exciting news we have had **3 hawksbill nests** so far this season!

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

LAST/WIDECASST continues to work with the Ministry of Education (MEP), Peace Corps, and World Vision towards educating the youth. The environmental education program was presented to the MEP regional director in the Limon province and all its supervisors in order to involve local and national schools in Pacuare's conservation activities. For example, a presentation on Pacuare and LAST/WIDECASST was given to the El Rosario High school en San José. By providing information about these magnificent reptiles, their fight for survival and conservation we hope motivate the children to protect them. Other activities included meeting with Sea Shepherd to work in partnership with their volunteers, a visit from professors of Earth University, Easter night patrols by local families and tourists and much more!

We are convinced that investing in education with kids is investing in a better future.



SEA TURTLE STRANDINGS

INTER-AMERICAN SEA TURTLE CONVENTION

Concerned for the mass mortality of sea turtles in the Golfo Dulce area last year, the IAC Scientific Committee Costa Rican Delegate and LAST/WIDECAST director requested that action be taken at a regional level. The director met with IAC president and member of U.S. State Department Alexis Gutierrez, Brian Stacey (NOAA Veterinary), Veronica Cáceres (IAC Secretariat) and Marino Abrego (ARAP in Panama) to agree on the permits and technical protocol to preserve samples to be exported USA for future analysis. At its 10th meeting, the IAC Scientific Committee formed a **Sea Turtle Stranding Working Group** to create a regional protocol on how to react to sea turtle strandings when they occur.



Great work bringing this important matter to regional attention!

SEA TURTLE STRANDING WORKSHOP

LAST/WIDECAST members participated in a sea turtle stranding workshop with international experts Terry Norton, DVM, of the Georgia Sea Turtle Center and Brian Stacy, DVM, of NOAA Fisheries.

The goal of the workshop was to get hands on experience and formalize a **protocol for researching and reporting on future sea turtle mass mortality events in Costa Rica**. We look forward to sharing this protocol with you in our next bulletin!

In early July, LAST/WIDECAST will participate in a similar workshop in Guatemala presented by our colleagues from ARCAS.



SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES NATIONAL CAMPAIGN

Incidental fishing of sea turtles is a tragedy that can be avoided!

The campaign enabled us to **raise awareness** on the impact of incidental capture and illegal fishing on sea turtles, **provide the knowledge and tools** to make a real change and help stop this unnecessary mortality, and **lobby** local and national government officials, delivering appropriate technical elements so the future government can better enforce and make changes to existing fisheries legislation.

We are proud to announce that almost **5,400 individuals joined our cause and signed our petition** to help stop the unnecessary deaths of thousands of animals, including sea turtles, in unsustainable fisheries.

CAMPAIGN HIGHLIGHTS

- Distribution of thousands of bumper/boat stickers, t-shirts, pamphlets
- Guide on how to release sea turtles caught incidentally
- Short story “The last caretaker of the sea” for school kids
- Continuous advertising on local and national radio and television
- Dozens of meetings with governmental officials responsible for monitoring and enforcing fishing laws
- And MUCH MUCH MORE!



However, the campaign is still not over! We have much work to do to continue conveying our message, strengthen our scientific evidence and educational programs. We look forward to your continued support. Please visit our social networking sites for continuous updates!

www.sialapescasostenible.com

www.facebook.com/sialapescasostenible

Twitter: @tortugascr

MORE LAST/WIDECAST NEWS...



TALK ON THE THREATS AND CURRENT STATUS OF PACIFIC HAWKSBILLS

As part of the **Yes to Sustainable Fisheries Campaign**, LAST/WIDECAST, the National University and the Eastern Pacific Hawksbill Initiative (ICAPO) organized a talk from sea turtle expert Alexander Gaos (ICAPO) on the threats and current status of hawksbill turtles on the Pacific Coast of Central America, the most endangered sea turtle on this coast.

Mr. Gaos explained that this species is very vulnerable to fisheries activities and only a sustainable fishery and safe fisheries practices are compatible with their survival.

PACUARE PARTICIPATES FOR FUNDING FROM EUROPEAN OUTDOOR CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

National Geographic of Germany is working with EOCA to provide funds to worthwhile groups that protect nature and our environment.

Pacuare is on of six projects that competed in the nature category for funds. We are grateful for the enormous amount of votes received from our local and national supporters. By voting for Pacuare, many Costa Rican Universities and High Schools in San Jose, Bataan, Matina and Siquirres voted against poaching and for a sustainable sea turtle in the Caribbean!



Thanks to all who voted and we look forward to hearing the results!

ONE YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE LOSS OF OUR DEAR FRIEND AND COLLEAGUE, JAIRO MORA

1987 - 2013



It is hard to believe a year has passed since the loss of our dear friend and colleague Jairo Mora Sandoval. He has not been forgotten and is still deeply missed within the conservation community. He will always be remembered for his enormous efforts to protect critically endangered leatherbacks nesting on the Caribbean beach of Moin. He lives on through continued efforts to protect this beach.

In his memory LAST/WIDECAST respectfully celebrated his life by sharing a video that captures his work with LAST/WIDECAST, his enormous love and passion for sea turtles, and the effect that he had on the entire community.

We ask that you take a few moments to view the video on our [Facebook page](#) and share it with others.

We would like to thank all of you who personally helped with the production of this video and have offered continuous support through these tough times. In particular a special thanks to the following individuals and institutions:

Sea Turtle Restoration Project, Todd Steiner

Seaturtles.org

LAST/WIDECAST, Didiher Chacon, Karen Eckert and Luis Fonseca

Humane Society International, Rebecca Regnery

SEETurtles, Brad Nahill

LivBlue

Ocean Revolution

PRETOMA, Randall Arauz

Sea Turtle Conservancy, David Godfrey

Leatherback Trust

Central American Service Expeditions, Matt Cook

Wild Seas, John Flynn

Blue Ocean Institution, Carl Safina

UPCOMING PROJECTS



REEF BALLS IN GOLFO DULCE

LAST/WIDECASST will be working with local groups in the Golfo Dulce to rehabilitate the reef ecosystems by using Reef Ball artificial reef technologies that are placed in the ocean to form reef habitat. This has been done successfully in many places around the world. This will also help with us with our mangrove restoration and sea grass bed programs.

We will keep you updated on our project to work together to protect and preserve our natural reef systems.



SEA TURTLE AND CORAL REEF MONITORING

Thanks to a small grant from the United Nations Development Program LAST/WIDECASST will be training members of Costa Rica's National System of Protected Areas (SINAC) on how to monitor sea turtles and coral reefs in two Protected Marine Areas in Cahuita and Santa Rosa National Parks.



SEA TURTLE CRIME SCENE INVESTIGATION (CSI)

Due to increased sea turtle stranding events it is more important than ever to have not only a quick and efficient response to these events, but also the proper training and tools to discover why they happened.

LAST/WIDECASST is proposing to do just that by training personnel from SINAC, Coast Guards, Environmental Court and Prosecutors on how to properly investigate and collect evidence. This training will be provided by Dave Gulko, an expert in the field.

If your interested in supporting this cause please contact us!



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COLABORATION AND AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many individuals and organizations have been instrumental in accomplishing these projects. We would like to thank everyone who played a role; it would not have been possible without your continued support and collaboration.

We want to sincerely thank all of our volunteers and research assistants

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