



Brief description of the project

The Corcovado Foundation's marine turtle conservation program has been in operation since July 2006. The project aims to study and preserve the population of the sea turtles that visit Drake Bay Beach.

The decline of marine turtle populations in regions like the Osa Peninsula is merely a reflection of a global situation that is threatening these reptiles worldwide. Currently, regions such as Drake Bay on the Osa Peninsula confront remarkable human population growth. This has brought as a consequence, many changes including the loss of important habitat for wild species.

With economically non-equitable development in the area, the possibilities increase that the local communities will be forced to apply even more pressure on some specific natural resources such as turtle eggs, furthering the already problematic status of certain endangered populations.

Preliminary studies showed an overall reduction in nesting activity on Drake Bay Beach. Then, according to research done by our organization in 2003, 2004 and 2005, the amount of nests poached was found to actually average more than 85%.

According to testimonies from several years ago, the turtle nesting species used to include *Eretmochelys imbricata* (Hawksbill / Tortuga Carey), *Dermochelys coriacea* (Leatherback / Tortuga Baula) and *Lepidochelys olivacea* (Olive Ridley / Tortuga Lora). Today, the *only* remaining turtle that still nests on Drake Bay beach is the olive ridley and it appears too to be nesting in decreasing numbers.

This decrease appeared to be the result of the poaching of turtle eggs, the destruction of nesting habitats by domestic animals, and the impact adult turtles getting caught in trammel nets cast by fishermen and by shrimpers who drag their nets over any living creature in their path. For all of these reasons, it is necessary to protect the beaches where sea turtle nesting is reported.

Since July 2006, volunteers, biologists and their assistants patrol the beach twice every night in search of turtle nests. Once the turtle has laid the eggs, the biologists decide if the nest is in a safe place or if the eggs should be relocated to another location on the beach or into the nursery. Eggs relocated in the nursery are carefully measured, weighed and counted, the original nest's location is noted and expected time of hatch for each specific nest is documented. The nursery is protected 24 hours a day, 7 days a week until the last egg hatches.

Environmental education is also a very important aspect of this project. The community is involved in many different ways in order to generate awareness of this natural treasure they hold. We visit the local schools and offer environmental education lessons; we invite



the students to participate of the patrolling of the beaches and to come see the turtle hatchlings released on the beach. We also participate in community meetings.

We involve the communities and create awareness among the people by organizing the annual Turtle Festival every November. This festive occasion stresses the importance of protecting the sea turtles and highlights the opportunities for increased income through eco-tourism.

The greatest accomplishment of our turtle project is the fact that 4,633 turtles were hatched and reached to the sea in 2006, 6700 turtles in 2007 and almost 10,000 in 2008.

Although every year the project has more and more allies from within the community, the volunteers and biologists every night face the hazard of confronting poachers that continue to come back. Some locals still have the deeply rooted habit of eating turtle eggs during the turtle season, some of them want the eggs in order to sell them to the local bars to make a small profit, while others poach nests simply because it is part of their culture.

Many people in the community have learned the new ways and understand that by supporting the turtle program, that they have opportunities for increased income because more people will come to Drake Bay to see the turtles, thus increasing eco-tourism in the area. These people have created ACOTPRO. This association works very closely with us at the Corcovado Foundation to support our efforts to protect the sea turtle population that nests on Drake Bay beach. Several members of the association have been trained in turtle handling and are capable of producing scientific data. These individuals, men and women of all ages, are capable of weighing eggs and hatchlings, measuring turtles and other related tasks. As a result, they are great guardians of these reptiles.

Further out in this effort our organization, with the support of the Clinica Biblica has planned to build a Turtle Conservation Center which will enable the foundation to host volunteers during the turtle season, and will also help generate income thru providing services to visitors during the tourist high season. The center will also provide of a space for the environmental education program, will include facilities for natural displays and also for communal activities. The structure will be managed by ACOTPRO, in order to generate the most economical benefits possible.



Main objective:

To strengthen the conservation project for the sea turtles of Drake Bay, through community involvement.

In order to guarantee the protection, conservation and sustainable use of the sea turtle resource a strategy to create awareness, train members of the community and generate direct income must be put into action.

Specific Objectives:

1. To reduce the poaching of turtle eggs and other natural resources, in the communities of El Progreso and Agujitas.
2. To promote the concept of natural heritage conservation among the local communities of El Progreso and Agujitas through environmental education.
3. To generate income for the members of the community involved in the turtle conservation efforts, so that they see their efforts rewarded.

Results Expected

- Achieve at least 85% protection of the turtle nests, beginning in 2011
- At least 10 additional people to join the efforts to conserve sea turtles, by 2013.
- At least 30 residents of El Progreso will have been trained in management of turtles, by 2012.
- At least one community conservation organization (ACOTPRO) established and developing ongoing activities related to the conservation of the marine turtle, 2012
- At least 100 volunteers supporting the initiative for the conservation of sea turtles every year starting in 2011.
- A field manual adapted and applicable to local people linked to turtle conservation, by the beginning of 2011.
- An operating center built and operating properly, to 2011.

Post Project Outcomes



- The marine turtle population in Drake Bay will show an increase within the next 15 years.
- A project related to eco-tourism that promotes the conservation of natural resources, especially the marine turtles, will be implemented.
- The Drake Bay Turtle project will be considered a sustainable model for the conservation of marine turtles.