

Project Update: January 2013

December 2012

IOSEA Regional Meeting.

Jess attended the Indian Ocean South East Asian Marine Turtle Memorandum of Understanding (IOSEA) regional workshop and Marine Turtle Task Force Meetings in early December 2012 in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. IOSEA brings together countries from the region to work together to conserve and replenish depleted marine turtle populations. Much of the workshop focused on reviewing species and other site-based information contained in IOSEA national reports in order to identify candidate sites for potential inclusion in the IOSEA Site Network. Experts attended from 10 of the 11 countries that constitute the Western Indian Ocean IOSEA sub-region: Comoros, France, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, South Africa, United Kingdom and United Republic of Tanzania. Through discussion of issues occurring in the region and through the process of trialing a ranking system for nomination areas to be included in the site network, it became very apparent that Mozambique is the furthest nation behind in the region in terms of research being conducted, local knowledge known and conservation activities and successes.



The Nesting Season Wraps Up.

In December 2012, approximately 80 km south from where the project is based a turtle nest suspected to be a leatherback laid on the beach. However, by the time the information was reported a few days later it had already been confirmed that the nest had been raided for its eggs immediately after the turtle had laid it. It's not confirmed if the mother turtle was poached or allowed to return to the water. From this part of Mozambique, minor conservation success occurred when authorities later arrested a fisherman who was caught with a turtle in his backpack. The poacher was taken to the police station and we believe he was fined for his actions. There are very few cases of authorities enforcing the laws protecting turtles and we can only hope this will be the first of many reports like this, from all regions of the coast.

Nesting season is wrapping up and it has been the quietest year on record for our region. Inhambane Province has approximately 500 km of coastline, of which the majority is suitable for nesting. However, due to extremely low nesting densities the coastline does not have a dedicated night time nesting patrols. Therefore, to monitor the nesting effort throughout the season, we rely on an informal network of people, mostly populated by owners and business managers of the hospitality industry to report turtle activity. Where once dedicated patrols occurred, now due to limited financial support, these beaches go un-patrolled.

In late January 2013, our first and only activity of the nesting season was reported from Barra Beach 5 km north of Tofo. Here they found two freshly hatched loggerhead hatchlings within close proximity to a local dive centre. The first hatchling was discovered because the dive centre dog, 'Bruce', was discovered with one of the small live hatchlings in his mouth. The turtle was quickly reduced and released. Then another hatchling was found under the dive centre decking but due to heavy rains and strong winds the tracks from hatchlings could not be traced back to the original nest location. A few days later the nest was discovered, under the dive centre decking, amazing given that no one had noticed the tracks from the nesting female when she crawled up the beach approximately 6 weeks prior!

January 2013

Understanding Turtle Poachers through Interviews.

Throughout January 2013 we have been working to collect more interviews from the spear fishers and fishermen to document their motives for fishing for turtles and other marine mega fauna. This work has proven to be more difficult than first suspected as our local staff helping to conduct the interviews left the project due to career opportunities. Taking on this minor setback, a new interviewer was recruited and trained up and plans were made to target four nearby coastal areas throughout January 2013: Tofo, Barra, Maxixe and Praia de Rocha. Some success was had in Maxixe where the leader of the local CCP (an organisation of fishers) helped our team to connect with fishers that were members of his organisation. He is enthusiastic about our work and very concerned with illegal and unsustainable fishing activities taking place in his region.

In Barra, fishermen were not as cooperative and we have only managed to complete one interview in this locality. Similarly the spear fishermen from Tofo were not enthusiastic to participate without being paid for their responses. Some success with interviews in Praia de Rocha, although transportation issues limited this work as the area is very remote and access is by 4 x 4 only. Further work in the next few months will continue in this area and we will explore the option of gratuity for participating in the surveys. One of the biggest hurdles with this work was the realisation that the community fishing groups, CCPs, which regulate themselves through an elected leader, do not include spear fishers, the primary turtle poachers. Reaching out to this already estranged group of often independent and rouge fishers will be challenging work for us in the next few months. However, we are positive that with some new interviews recited to our team and a revised strategy, we can collate the information necessary.