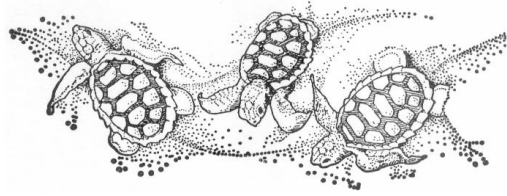


# Sea Turtles Forever



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## Attention: Rufford Small Grant Foundation

RE: Reference # 12794-1

### Progress Report 2012/2013 season:

#### 1. Achievement of projects original objectives:

The 2012/2013 season has so far been a record success for Sea Turtles Forever (STF) marine turtle monitoring patrols on Punta Pargos. STF excelled at completing the original objectives of securing the area from poaching, integrating the local community into the project, and teaching others conservation strategies. STF monitoring patrols secured 20% more nests than any previous year in our 11 year history. Our previous secured nest record was 156 nests but during the 2012/2013 season approximately 180 nests have been secured. An increased egg per nest number has put us at an approximately 40% increase in eggs secured, which represents over 14,000 marine turtle eggs on the data. 172 nests were secured in the main project area and 12 nests were secured outside the main project in the secluded area of Playa Honda. The nests in the Playa Honda area were secured and monitored by Harley Vargas a Costa Rican STF trained monitor who is paid through the STF nest bonus program. This is a very secluded and violent area and Harley is living proof that this program can save thousands of doomed turtles outside the main project by training and creating livelihoods for local citizens in these hard to patrol, dangerous and secluded areas.

94% of the overall nests laid in the main project area were secured for hatch.

45 *Chelonia Mydas* were identified by tags nesting in the main project area.

Of the 45 tagged turtles documented:

34 were newly tagged by STF monitors.

7 were STF tags re-encountered from previous seasons.

4 were turtles tagged on other projects on the Nicoya Peninsula.

This tag data gave STF new information on the inter-annual nesting periodicity of *Chelonia Mydas*. This valuable data also gave STF new information on the spatial distribution of nesting *Chelonia Mydas* for the Nicoya Peninsula. STF documented marine turtles that were previously documented nesting 50 kilometers away.

## 2. Unforeseen difficulties:

Our only significant unforeseen difficulty was experienced when a newly trained monitor failed to log his data and mistakenly took data home with him to Germany when his period of work was completed. It took some time to retrieve that segment of data and also has taken some time to fuse it back into the Excel program chronologically without disrupting the program. Due to the unforeseen spike in data we have had to do some extra work to keep our data base management organized. This increase in data volume has caused our technical report to be slightly delayed.

## 3. Most Important outcomes:

The most important outcomes of the Punta Pargos Project this year have been our incredible success at disrupting the poaching of endangered species in the area, developing livelihoods and income for local people through conservation, and expanding professional collaborations with local governmental agencies.

## 4. Involvement of local communities:

STF has increased our collaboration with Rotney Piedra and the Parque Nacional Marinas los Baulas at Playa Grande where some of the off project tags we encountered have been identified as coming from. Collaboration with Rotney Piedra for a technical paper on *Chelonia Mydas* nesting has been undertaken. This partnership will benefit the overall data synthesis for the region and also connects STF with governmental entities that are important partners for our future development. Although we have collaborated in the past with this group of researchers we have solidified the partnership and are working closely with Rotney Piedra, the national park Director, and Bibi Sandriani the parks top biologist. Rotney has written a governmental letter of support for STF operations on Punta Pargos.

STF is working with William Arauz, the Municipal Director of Santa Cruz and the Tempisque District to develop our educational program that teaches conservation to local school children. The municipality supports the project but suggested one change in operations. William Arauz suggested we enlist a Costa Rican to speak at our presentations due to the fact that local kids are more open to suggestion from nationals than from foreigners. Our educational programs have been operated by project directors from America, but STF will enlist a Costa Rican presenter as we move forward with this aspect of the operation.

STF trained five new Costa Rican marine turtle monitors during the 2012/2013 season. This part of our work is vital and builds local support for our work. By creating livelihoods in conservation for local

individuals we extend our influence to many family members connected to these new monitors. This also gives STF monitors with valuable knowledge of the area, and establishes a constant STF presence in the area even during the off season when our biologists and key administrators return to their home bases in other countries.

STF developed a new collaboration with a Costa Rican tour agency on Punta Pargos so tourists coming to the area could join our monitoring teams at night. This brought some income to the Costa Rican tour business, and also generated operational funds for STF.

STF volunteers rented housing from local businesses, and ate at local restaurants, which also supports the community. The financial benefits STF created for the community of Los Pargos are a key aspect to the long-term success of the operation. By developing livelihoods in conservation and income for local business a great value is placed on the project by the indigenous people. This helps create the cultural change that is necessary to stop the poaching. Income once generated by poaching of wildlife is replaced by honest work and this dissolves the negative attitudes that come from removing the illegal income from poaching in a very poor and underprivileged community.

23 student volunteers from foreign countries were trained by STF staff during the 2012/2013 season ( 8 from Australia, 10 from Canada, and 5 from the United States). These university students learned marine turtle monitoring strategies and protocols and assisted STF personnel in monitoring activities, and cultural immersion.

Extensive habitat work was completed by STF teams at Lagartillo Reef, approximately 17,000 marine debris items were removed from prime foraging and nesting area. This is vital to the health of our marine turtle cohort and also the artisanal fishing industry of the local community. The reef has been revitalized, and the benefit has shown in the top Lobster catch recorded in decades and also a significant increase in the number of fish caught by artisanal boats. The fishermen have expressed gratitude and awe at the increased amount of Lobster and fish on the reef, and also the increase in marine turtles foraging in the area. This counters the fact that we are controlling the illegal harvest of marine turtles and turtle eggs which was previously an income for some of these artisanal fishermen. There is much more value in Lobster and fish than there is in illegally harvested turtles and turtle eggs, and the fishermen see how our reef revitalization program has benefited them, dissolving animosity and building friendship and support for our continued work in the area.

## 5. Plans to continue:

STF will continue this important work on Punta Pargos and in the surrounding area as long as we can maintain funding and support for our efforts.

## 6. Sharing our results:

Results of our work on Punta Pargos have been collected on a continuous basis for over a decade. A full annual technical report for 2013 is forthcoming and data is shared with all projects in the region, and any other researchers interested in our results.

STF gained a new sponsor organization in 2013, The Ocean Foundation, which granted the project \$1000US for our project on Punta Pargos.

Support from The Rufford Small Grant Foundation was the key to our success, and will continue to keep our operation moving forward during the remainder of the 2013 season.

Looking ahead it seems our biggest challenge is to continue to fund our operations; therefore our most important aspect for continuation would seem to be finding sponsors and donors and generating working capital.

We posted RSGF as a sponsor on our web-site and also on social networking sites for STF, we are very proud to be supported by such a fantastic organization that sees the value of monitoring endangered species and curtailing the illegal harvest of endangered species.

Thank you for the support, we will do great things for the environment and continue to hatch thousands of otherwise doomed turtles due to the support from Rufford Small Grant Foundation.

