

Project Update: April 2019

In March 2019, three students from Colorado State University (United States) completed a 10-day internship in Baja, Mexico with Stephanie and her team. Dani and Abigail are undergraduates in wildlife biology and conservation and Kim is a graduate student studying sustainability. We started out snorkeling and coordinating a newly formed citizen science group in the fishing village and seasonal kite boarding town of “El Sargento”. On the way there, we found a discarded sea turtle carapace near the highway. The interns took measurements (Figure 1) and we registered the location, however it was over 12 km from the nearest coastline.



Figure 1. CSU interns using VFH radio at the marina clubhouse to collect sea turtle sighting information and remind boaters to reduce their speed through sea turtle feeding zones and report any sightings.

While in the village, the girls put up posters about our Sea Turtle Spotter citizen science programme around town at the markets, tourism hubs, and local hangouts to encourage more people to register their sea turtle sightings. The interns met with Mary Sim, a long-time sea turtle ambassador of our Sea Turtle Spotter program. Mary found a previously undocumented feeding ground for endangered hawksbills and green turtles, so the

interns accompanied her for their first underwater Gulf of California interaction with sea turtles and began collecting notes on the behavior, habitat, and location.

After El Sargento, we stayed at the La Duna Ecology Center on La Paz Bay, where the interns documented several dead, stranded sea turtles and created a methodology and data sheets to collect information about macro and micro plastics in the intertidal areas adjacent to sea turtle feeding zones. They also visited the nearby fishing camp, "Las Pacas" and took a boat ride to snorkel in sea turtle habitat with fishermen Don Carlos and visit with his family back on shore. We donated a pole and fishing line with lures as the fish camp has recently joined the local fishermen sea turtle conservationist programme that works with artisanal fishermen to recycle gillnets and practice pole and line fishing. We also donated the funds to help the fish camp purchase their new fishing permit that allows them to fish for sport fish rather than gillnets.

Last stop was Marina of La Paz where the interns made announcements on the marina VHF radio (Figure 2) about our citizen science programme, reminded boaters to reduce their speeds in sea turtle feeding zones, and collect information about sea turtle sightings. One sailboat, S/V Jersey Girl was so inspired, they invited us to go sailing and sea turtle spotting in one of their favorite spots, "La Partida" a shallow bay within the Espiritu Santo marine protected area. There we saw an heard between 20-50 turtles feeding and surfacing. This is a popular anchorage for sailboats from La Paz and those traveling through the Gulf of California. Inbetween the sailboats, often sea turtles can be spotted (Figure 3). Just other fabulously successful month for Sea Turtle Spotter thanks to the Rufford Foundation!



Figure 1. CSU interns collecting data on a sea turtle carapace reported found on the side of the highway near a fishing village but over 12 km from the water, dumped at a roadside dumpsite with evidence of remnants from a bonfire.

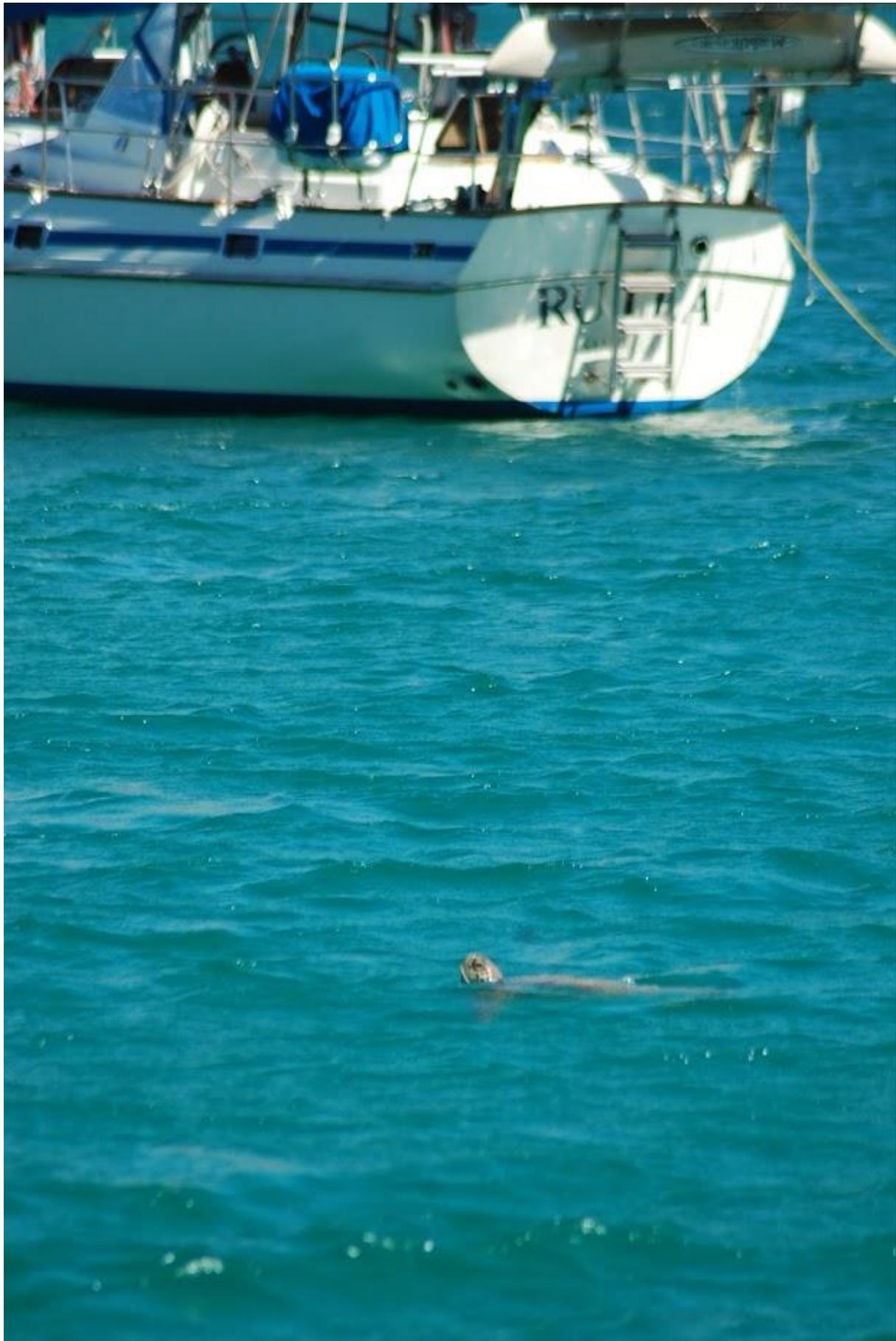


Figure 2. Sea Turtle Spotter success! Sea turtle spotted and reported from a sailboat "Jersey Girl" surfacing for air in front of a neighboring sailboat "Rutta" at a popular sailing anchorage.