

## **Project Update: December 2019**

### **Introduction:**

The project started in August 2019 and is making good progress. The project started with a planning meeting with the Ghana Wildlife Division and Ghana Turtle Conservation Project team about the goals of the project, since the team will provide community entry support and assistance for the project. Chiefs and elders of the project communities were consulted to solicit their support for the project. General announcements were made in communities about the project.

### **Project Activities:**

The following activities have been conducted so far:

*Mobilisation and preparation of field equipment:* Field equipment was prepared for including the ONSET temperature loggers, Garmin handheld GPS device, 50 m tape measure, 5000 g capacity balance, digital caliper, hand-held click counter, headlamps with red light, batteries, camera, nest boxes and field notebook with pencil. However, flipper tags and passive integrated transponder (PIT) tags were provided by the wildlife division. Before taking them to the field, temperature loggers are activated with the software, the balance and caliper calibrated while the headlamps and GPS device are carried along with extra batteries.

*Beach patrols and nesting surveys:* A nightly beach patrol was started on the 30<sup>th</sup> August 2019 to monitor all sea turtle activities on the beach and to keep the poaching rate at an absolute minimum. Patrolling was done for a minimum of 8 hours from 20:00 to 04:00. This schedule allowed us to maximise turtle encounters as we covered the beach until almost sunrise. During night patrols we encountered tracks and turtles and performed tagging, measuring, counting of eggs and sometimes immediate nest relocation protocols.

Morning patrols were also conducted to monitor and record hatching activity and immediately release turtles from nest boxes when they climbed to the surface, record any evidence of poaching or erosion and conduct nest excavations for nests with no hatching activity within the full 70-day incubation period or nests within 5 days of hatching activity to exhume the contents of the nests.

*Installation of temperature loggers:* The first batch of loggers were installed early to the given fieldwork plan. After the 30<sup>th</sup> day of placing the loggers in the nest, nest boxes were placed on the nests. After the nests hatched, 30 hatchlings each per nest were sampled at random, and carapace length, carapace width and mass of hatchlings were recorded. Photographs were taken of all randomly selected hatchlings to check for carapace and shell mutations for archival purposes. All data loggers were removed after the nest hatched and data have been downloaded from the loggers.

The second batch of loggers were installed in late October 2019 and turtles have successfully hatched with the loggers retrieved. Loggers placed in nests during the middle of November and early December 2019 were also being monitored against interferences as the nests were yet to hatch. Night patrols are still ongoing, and loggers have been activated for late December 2019 as well.

### **Next Steps:**

The next phase of the project will involve installation of loggers for the late December period and constant monitoring of nests from the mid-November period. Also, analysis

of data from retrieved and downloaded loggers from October are underway. Meanwhile, preparations are also being made to start education in schools after their holiday break and involve more community members in the community education.



Above: Measurements from hatchlings. Below: Placing of screen boxes over nests.





Above: Hatchlings been released from boxes. Below: Labelled data logger.







Above: Data logger installed in nest. Below: Counting of eggs.

