



NEWSLETTER

REGIONAL NORTHWEST ATLANTIC

LEATHERBACK ACTION PLAN PROJECT

ISSUE 2 | SEPTEMBER - DECEMBER 2021

This newsletter is to provide our stakeholders with the updates and the next steps of the Regional Northwest Atlantic Leatherback Action Plan Project (RAP) in the region with the focus on French Guiana, Suriname, Guyana, and Trinidad & Tobago.

UPDATES

MONTHLY WORKING GROUP MEETINGS

The monthly working group update meetings for the RAP continued. The meetings were led by WWF-Guianas (Suriname and Guyana) with the representatives of the partner organizations which are WWF-Canada, the Environmental Management Authority (EMA) in Trinidad and Tobago, French Office of Biodiversity (OFB) and WWF-France in French Guiana and WWF-Netherlands to discuss the progress on the project.

THREAT SURVEY

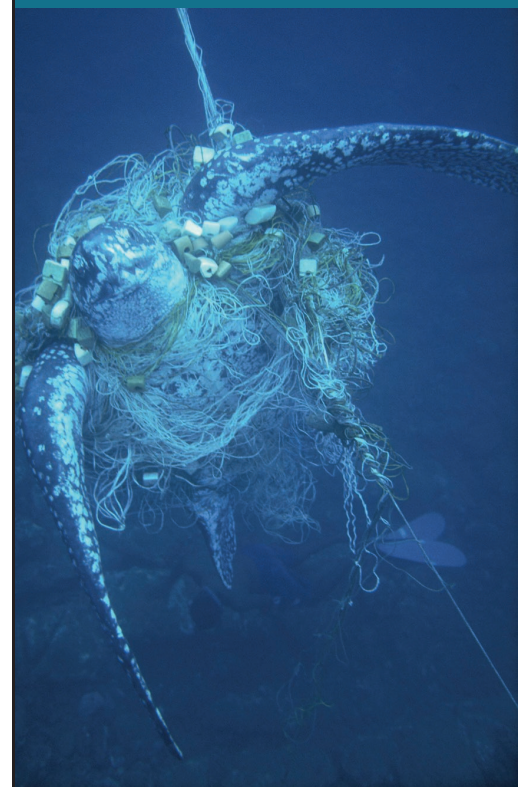
Falling nest counts for the Northwest Atlantic (NWA) leatherback subpopulation are particularly alarming in French Guiana, which at the turn of the century hosted the largest nesting assemblage in the region (and an estimated 40% of the world's total) but has recently declined by ~99%. Trinidad, second to French Guiana in the number of turtles arriving to nest each year, has seen a smaller but sustained decline at major nesting grounds.

To better understand causal factors, both in the Guianas and elsewhere in the Wider Caribbean, a threat survey was conducted by the Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network (WIDECAST) and the results were presented by Dr. Karen Eckert (WIDECAST) at the virtual regional meeting in November 2021. The document

was also shared with all the attendees of the regional meeting for peer-review.

The survey report documents stakeholder knowledge in the 33 Caribbean countries where leatherbacks nest, focusing on the frequency and magnitude of threats both to eggs/ hatchlings and to turtles on the nesting beach and at sea. The report concludes that fisheries interactions are the dominant threat at sea, while erosion, pollution, and habitat conversion top the list on nesting beaches.

Sustained recovery of the subpopulation will require strategic conservation investment integrated with considerations of population size and stock diversity. This report and its conclusions and recommendations will form the basis of a Regional Action Plan based on best practice approaches to priority threats.

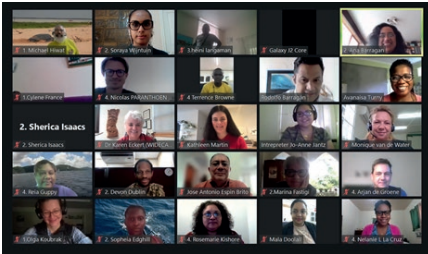




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UPDATES

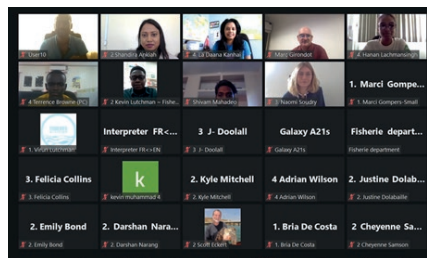
REGIONAL STAKEHOLDER MEETING



On 2, 3 and 5 November 2021, the regional online stakeholder meeting for the RAP, focusing on the countries of Suriname, Guyana, French Guiana, Trinidad and Tobago, and Canada was conducted. This regional meeting was organized by the WWF-Guianas in collaboration with the partners, EMA, OFB, WWF-Canada and WWF-Netherlands. During the meeting there were 92 attendees and presentations from over 11 countries representing Suriname, Guyana, French Guiana, Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Martinique, the United States of America, Canada, France, and the Netherlands.



The objective of this meeting was for stakeholders of French Guiana, Suriname, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago to discuss and analyze current threats and challenges for the conservation of the NWA Leatherback turtle subpopulation and provide elements for defining actions to be included in a RAP.



There were four (4) priority topics in which a vision for a desired state, concrete actions proposed to achieve that ideal state, goals and expected results and deliverables were obtained.

These four (4) priority topics were:

1. Legislation and enforcement;
2. Protection/Management of critical habitats;
3. Community engagement; and
4. Scientific data needs.

The report compiles the analysis of the workshop results and shows preliminary concept maps for each priority topic.

Currently, the meeting report is being summarized and translated into French and Dutch.

The full report can be accessed via:

<https://wwfsr.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/EW77hSyIVTtLr5gh2GTjmDUB4ae9b7--N-xHDEYncXPS-w?e=Yte8EI>

FRENCH GUIANA



Two (2) working groups meetings were held in October (18 October 2021) and November (30 November 2021). The first meetings was about environmental education and the second meeting was about onshore threats. For each group, around 10 stakeholders participated, and the review of the year was presented (including those related to the RAP) and the perspectives for 2022.

After the regional stakeholder meeting, there was a short article written ([see link](#)) to summarize the meeting and the goals. The idea was to maintain the interest in the RAP aprocess and share information with stakeholders that could not attend the meeting. The article was published on the French Guiana marine turtle network website, on OFB's national website and shared on social media.

SURINAME

- A mark-recapture analysis of the Leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*) for the NWA sub-population is being conducted by Dr. Bryan Wallace of Ecolibrium. The grant was issued by WWF-Guianas to Ecolibrium and the funding comes from NFWF. The analysis will identify and address leatherback bycatch priorities in Trinidad and Tobago and the Guianas;
- In December, a story on the decline of the leatherback population on the nesting beaches in Suriname was published in the local Parbode Magazine. The story can be accessed via the following link: <https://www.parbode.com/alarmerende-terugval-aitkanti-populatie-parbode-sneak-peek/>;
- Success stories of persons, such as game warden, fishermen and indigenous community members, that play an important role in protecting the leatherback on our nesting beaches have been gathered for a Donor Magazine of WWF-NL;
- As part of the study to analyze the priorities at the national level in Suriname for the NWA leatherback sea turtle subpopulation as part of the RAP, virtual consultations have been conducted with the stakeholders in Suriname.



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UPDATES

GUYANA

- As part of the study to analyze the priorities at national level in Guyana for the NWA leatherback sea turtle subpopulation as part of the RAP, consultations have started with several stakeholders, but the rising number of active COVID cases is delaying the field related work.

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

- The National Sea Turtle Task Force has endeavored to erect signage across nesting beaches in Trinidad & Tobago;
- A government representative, from the EMA, attended the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles' (IAC's) scientific meeting as an observer;
- As part of the study to analyze the priorities at national level in Trinidad & Tobago for the NWA leatherback sea turtle subpopulation as part of the RAP, physical consultations have been held with several fishermen and non-governmental organization/community-based organization (NGO/CBO) stakeholders in Tobago.

CANADA

- WWF-Canada continued to engage fish harvesters in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador through local fisheries partner, the Fish Food and Allied Workers Union (FFAW-Unifor) on use of detangler tool;
- Feedback and request for additional line-cutter tools was received from FFAW-Unifor:
 - A detangler tool has been used to detangle one (1) turtle and porpoise so far!
- Began process of ordering new tools to distribute in 2022;
- Began process of creating new education materials to reflect additional wildlife which may benefit from use of the detangler tool;
- The instructional video demonstrating the proper use of the tool can be accessed here:

WATCH VIDEO



COMMUNICATION MATERIALS

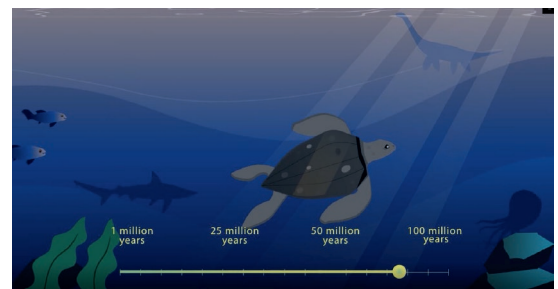
REGIONAL LEATHERBACK INFOGRAPHIC POSTER

The infographic posters are available in three (3) languages English, Dutch and French. The posters are available in French Guiana, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago and Canada. The distribution of the posters is still ongoing, and the digital versions were uploaded.



LEATHERBACK ANIMATION MOVIE

In French Guiana, Suriname and Guyana, the movie was posted on Youtube in three (3) languages (Dutch, English and French), shared on Facebook and on a website (<https://www.tortuesmarinesguyane.com/videos>). The movie was re-shared by FG marine turtle network members on their Facebook page. Until now the movie has 557 views on Youtube.



In Suriname, on 9 October 2021, the animation movie in Dutch was launched on local television during the Turtle Tank series by the Summer Green School.

WATCH VIDEO



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COMMUNICATION MATERIALS

STUDIES TO ANALYZE PRIORITIES AT NATIONAL LEVEL IN SURINAME, GUYANA AND TRINIDAD & TOBAGO:

In October 2021, the three (3) studies started to analyze the priorities at the national level for the NWA leatherback sea turtle subpopulation as part of the RAP in Suriname, Guyana and Trinidad & Tobago. These studies will provide a detailed analysis of the priorities at the national level for the NWA leatherback sea turtle subpopulation and will be incorporated in the RAP. These three (3) studies will be finalized by February 2022.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE RAP:

Development of the RAP has started and the draft table of contents that considers the priority topics as main strategic lines and transversal lines identified during the workshop has been shared with the regional working group. Furthermore, recommendations generated in prior workshops and documents are being reviewed, in order to identify possible gaps in the list of lines and actions that might be relevant to the RAP.

FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES:

As start of the fundraising activities, WWF-Netherlands has reached out to donors for initial funding for the implementation phase of the RAP. Brainstorming sessions will be conducted to develop a fundraising strategy and identifying donors.

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

January 2022:

- Finalization of the threat survey report;
- Virtual consultations are planned with the stakeholders in Trinidad.
- The newsletter of the French Guiana (FG) sea turtle network will be sent to their stakeholders.
- Two (2) other working groups meetings will be held: threats at sea and improvement of knowledge.

February 2022: - Finalizing the studies to analyze priorities at national level in Suriname, Guyana, and Trinidad & Tobago;

Late February / early March: - Feedback consultations with experts for the draft RAP

Late March / early April 2022: - Regional validation meeting for the RAP;

March-May 2022: - Training by OFB in pit tagging for Suriname and Guyana in the Galibi Nature Reserve.

If you have questions or suggestions, please reach out to one of our country representatives:

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