



REGIONAL NORTHWEST ATLANTIC LEATHERBACK ACTION PROJECT

ISSUE 5 | FEBRUARY - JULY 2023

This newsletter is to provide our stakeholders with updates and the next steps of the Regional Northwest Atlantic Leatherback Action Plan (RAP) Project in the region with a focus on French Guiana, Suriname, Guyana, and Trinidad and 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 the Environmental Management Authority (EMA) in Trinidad and Tobago, French Office of Biodiversity (OFB), WIDECAST and WWF-France in French Guiana and WWF-Netherlands to discuss the progress and implementation of the project.

INTERNATIONAL SEA TURTLE SYMPOSIUM



The Oceans coordinator, Soraya Wijntuin, participated in the 41st International Sea Turtle Symposium (ISTS41) in Cartagena, Colombia, from 18th - 24th March 2023 as part of the WWF Global Sea Turtle team. This resulted in 4 presentations, of which included the Call to Action to save our NWA leatherback and our needs for the RAP. There was a total of 583 attendees from 66 countries.

As a highlight, two of our RAP movies were selected to be shown during the ISTS movie night:

- The documentary Leatherback Turtles: A Regional Action Plan for the NWA Leatherback Population
- The animation: The Dangerous Life of a Leatherback





UPDATES

WIDECAST ANNUAL MEETING

The Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network (WIDECAST) held its annual meeting from 19-20 March 2023 in Cartagena, Colombia. Participants – including biologists, policymakers, and educators from throughout the Wider Caribbean region – shared information on sea turtle research, management, and outreach programs.



There were 25 technical presentations by experts from as many countries, including updates from the secretariat offices of the Interamerican Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC) and the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) to the UNEP Cartagena Convention. Other highlights included a presentation by Soraya Wijntuin on progress related to the Regional Action Plan

for the Leatherback Sea Turtle and Round Table discussions focused on the EU-funded CAMAC Project (Caribbean Marine Megafauna and Anthropogenic Activities).

REGIONAL WORKSHOP

On June 16, 2023, the virtual Regional RAP workshop was held with a total of 56 participants from the Guianas (Suriname, Guyana and French Guiana), Trinidad and Tobago, Canada, Costa Rica, USA, Guadeloupe, France, Grenada (including Carriacou), Saint Kitts, and The Netherlands. The key results were:

- The IAC (Inter-American Sea Turtle Convention) has pledged support to encourage governments to support the RAP and to become involved in its implementation.
- The implementation of the RAP is not completely dependent on endorsement by the governments of the implementing countries, but it is desirable.
- Tackling IUU and bycatch is a high priority on the agenda of the Guianas.
- Regarding countries outside of the Guianas and Trinidad and Tobago, a decline in Leatherback nests has been observed for several years. Only St. Kitts and Nevis reported a slight increase compared to the previous year, year, but a steep



- long term decline is clear there, too.
- There are more overlaps regarding the current actions and prospects of the RAP-implementing countries.
- Countries have monitoring and surveillance of nesting beaches, especially during turtle season to protect NWA Leatherback Sea turtles.

5-YEAR PROPOSAL, INCLUDING THE PUBLIC SUMMARY (CONSULTANCY FARAH MUKHIDA & LOUISE SOANES)

In the regional workshop, the 5-year proposal was presented, and the results were discussed. The proposal developed is for the 5-year funding to implement the full RAP, and the proposal includes work plans and a budget for each strategic line. The total cost to implement the 5-year RAP in The Guianas and Trinidad and Tobago will be nearly USD 9.8 million.

The five-year proposal is also made more accessible in a public summary. Please read the public summary through the link:

[RAP Public Summary](#)



COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS FRENCH GUIANA

NATIONAL DIALOGUE

From February to June 2023, three strategic meetings were held as part of the Sea Turtle National Action Plan (NAP) in French Guiana: the working group on threat reduction at sea (on January 27, 2023), the working group on knowledge improvement or Scientific Committee (on April 19, 2023) and the Steering committee (on June 14, 2023). More than twenty stakeholders provided updates on their activities, including those aligned with the RAP's strategic lines and actions.



RAP ENDORSEMENT

The RAP has been integrated into the current NAP for marine turtles in French Guiana because a specific objective is linked to cross-border cooperation. The RAP was officially handed over to the State Secretary for the Sea, Hervé Berville, during his visit to French Guiana in May 2023. A letter of intention from France to become a member of the IAC was also presented to the Secretariat in February 2023.

MONITORING NESTING ACTIVITY

Since January 2023, sea turtle nesting activity has been monitored in Awala-Yalimapo by the Amana Nature Reserve, in Kourou by the OFB and in Cayenne/Rémire-Montjoly by Kwata NGO. So far, more than 1600 leatherback nests have been counted, about twice as much as the previous year! This encouraging increase is mainly observed at the Cayenne/Rémire-Montjoly nesting site, hosting around 90% of this year's clutches.

CREATION OF A NATURAL HATCHERY IN AWALA-YALIMAPO



In western French Guiana, leatherback turtle nesting activity on Yalimapo Beach, once known as the world's largest nesting site for this species, has declined by an alarming 95% in just 20 years. It is with a view to helping halt this decline as far as possible that the members of the Marine Turtle Network in French Guiana (RTMG) have collectively committed to the deployment of a natural hatchery on this beach: the aim is to counter three major terrestrial threats (dog predation, poaching and erosion). During this pilot year for the project, the eggs laid by the leatherbacks will be moved to a protected area of the beach at the time of laying. In this way, incubation takes place under constant protection until emergence to maximize hatching success. The natural hatchery was officially inaugurated on Thursday, May 4, 2023, in the presence of Mr. Hervé Berville (State Secretary of the Sea). This project is led by Kwata NGO in partnership with the Amana Nature Reserve, WWF France, OFB, CNRS, the government (DGTM) and the territorial collectivity (CTG).



COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS | FRENCH GUIANA

END OF PALICA II AND ARRIBA PROJECTS

Two innovative bycatch reduction projects are currently led by WWF France and the Fisheries Committee (CRPMEM) in French Guiana:

- The PALICA II project (“Pêcheries Actives pour la Limitation des Interactions et des Captures Accidentelles”) involves testing four alternatives to driftnet fishing: changing the colour of floats, reducing the vertical profile of nets, eliminating float lines and using acoustic transmitters to scare away cetaceans. In particular, the elimination of float lines seems to reduce bycatch and be commercially interesting for fishermen. This project was funded by Europe (FEAMP funds) and ended in June 2023. Testing will continue through the PALICA III project from 2024 to 2026, with funding from the French government (DGTM).
- The ARRIBA project (“Alerte aux Risques Relatifs aux Interactions Bloquant les Arribadas”) focuses primarily on olive ridley but can also benefit leatherbacks. In partnership with fishermen, a voluntary no-fishing zone has been created in front of the Cayenne/Rémire Montjoly nesting site. For part of the nesting season, professional fishermen voluntarily choose not to fish in an area with a substantial risk of turtle-fishing interaction. This OFB-funded project ended in 2022, but a new project called YANA RIBA has already taken over.

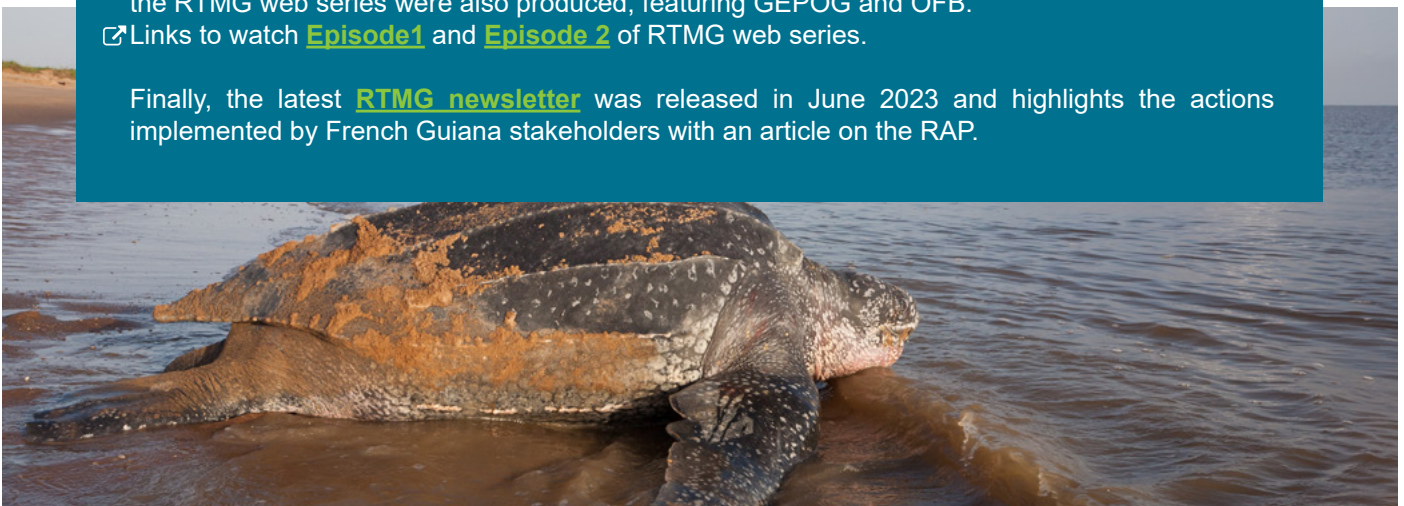


COMMUNICATION & ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

The first part of 2023 was rich in public events (Nature Festival, Science Village, Ocean Week, etc.) and school activities (for example, an educational project with a dozen classes that led to the creation of a collection of short stories written by children about sea turtles). Two new episodes of the RTMG web series were also produced, featuring GEPOG and OFB.

🔗 Links to watch [Episode 1](#) and [Episode 2](#) of RTMG web series.

Finally, the latest [RTMG newsletter](#) was released in June 2023 and highlights the actions implemented by French Guiana stakeholders with an article on the RAP.





COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS SURINAME

RAP NATIONAL WORKSHOPS

The National Stakeholder Workshop, co-hosted by the Nature Conservation Division of the Ministry of Land and Forest Management (GMB) was held in Suriname on May 24, 2023, with 45 participants for implementing and adapting the RAP. At this workshop, the national stakeholders indicated their current and planned national efforts aligned with the four respective RAP strategic lines, shared actions taken towards saving leatherback turtles, and outlined the way forward for national adaptation of the RAP. The results of these workshops were presented during the Regional RAP workshop held on June 16, 2023.

RAP ENDORSEMENT

During the national workshop in Suriname, the RAP was presented to Ms Lavanda Koedemoesoe, acting Deputy Director of Forest Management of the Ministry of GMB. On June 28, 2023, we were delighted to receive the first national endorsement letter from Minister Vorswijk of the Ministry of Land Policy and Forest Management (Suriname) and that Suriname is willing to implement the priority actions and activities listed during the national workshop held on May 24th, 2023. We are waiting for the response to the policy letter sent to the Minister of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries and the President.

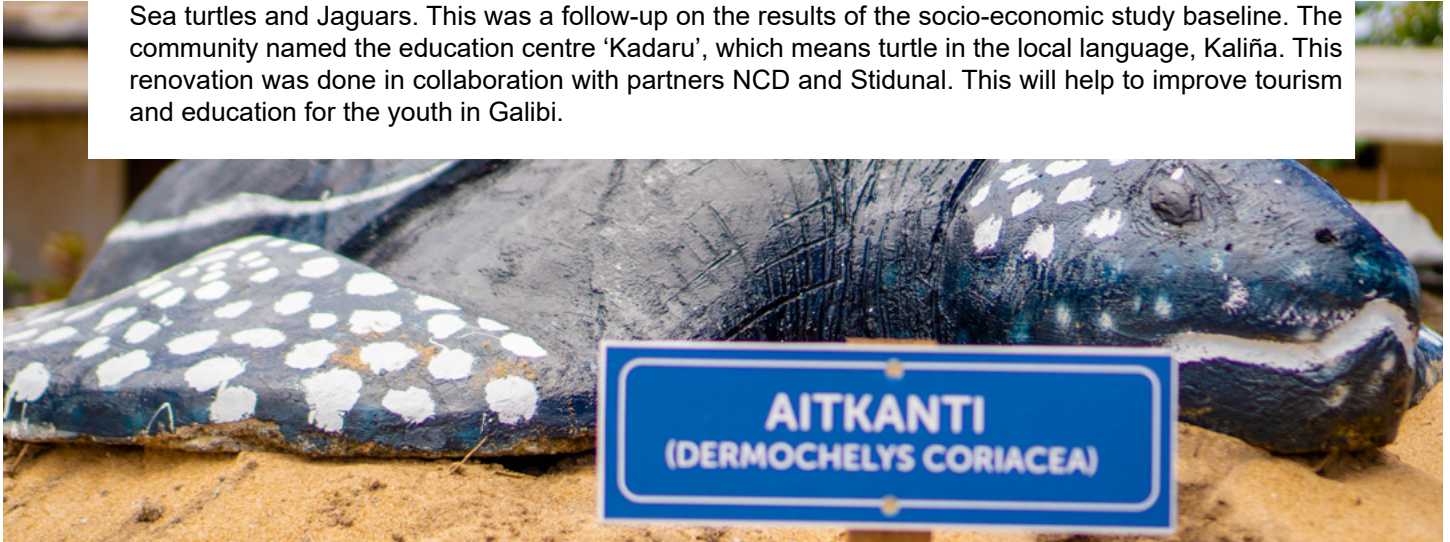


On February 24, 2023, the education centre for Braamspunt was opened; this was also updated to increase awareness and promote sea turtle education for tourists. This was done in collaboration with NCD and Commissariaat Commewijne.



COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS SURINAME

On February 23, 2023, the education centre in Galibi was renovated and updated for awareness of Sea turtles and Jaguars. This was a follow-up on the results of the socio-economic study baseline. The community named the education centre 'Kadaru', which means turtle in the local language, Kaliña. This renovation was done in collaboration with partners NCD and Stidunal. This will help to improve tourism and education for the youth in Galibi.



On February 23, 2023, the inauguration of the solar panel system of the multifunctional centre in Galibi took place. The multifunctional building at Galibi is equipped with a 4.89 KWP solar panel system with batteries installed by HSW Energy. This solar energy system project was funded by the Charles Stewart MOTT Foundation and WWF-NL and implemented by WWF-Guianas and energy experts Ryan Nannan, Anand Kalpoe, and HSW Energy. This PV system (photovoltaic system) will enable the nature conservation projects of WWF-Guianas, such as mapping jaguars and monitoring sea turtles using the SMART tool in Galibi.

From March to June 2023, there were monitoring and enforcement activities on both nesting beaches (Braamspunt and Galibi) being conducted by the Nature Conservation Division (NCD) and Stidunal.

On March 21, the sustainable sea turtle tourism training for tour guides Commewijne and United Tour Guides Suriname (UTGS) was held at Plantage Resort Frederiksdorp; there were 52 attendees. This continued the collaboration between the Plantage Resort Frederiksdorp, the Nature Conservation Division (NCD) and WWF-Guianas and Commissariaat Commewijne.

From March to May, there was a follow-up of the school awareness sessions. WWF, NCD, Commissariaat (CC) Commewijne and the Ministry of Education joined forces to execute awareness activities on the importance of sea turtles and why poaching is not allowed at a total of 45 schools primary and secondary schools in the district Paramaribo, Commewijne, Wanica, Nickerie and Marowijne.

From May 1-6, 2023, The Oceans Coordinator participated in SMART advanced training in Cambodia regarding the new features and challenges other offices faced. The training in the new features will be shared with the local partners as

soon as the pending SMART MoU is signed to start with the SMART pilot.

On June 27, 2023, a sponsoring agreement was signed between WWF and Telesur for a 50-50 deal of a 2-year data package for the multifunctional building in Galibi. This will facilitate the monitoring of the PV system remotely and will allow the use of SMART and allow the partners to communicate more efficiently.

At the 2023 WIDECAST Annual Meeting in Cartagena, Colombia, the challenge of the increased erosion and flooding of Braamspunt Beach and loss of nests was shared for similar cases or advice by the experts. This resulted in the support of WWF-NL to contract Deltares and TU Delft to conduct the study on Short- and Long-Term Solutions to Address Sea Turtle Nesting at Braamspunt and stakeholders engaged in the results. [Link to Deltares Study](#).

The recommendation was shared and discussed with the national stakeholders and WIDECAST experts on June 26, 2023, and they provided input on what is feasible for Suriname. [Link to view results of input from stakeholders](#)

In March 2023, a meeting was organised in Paramaribo between the fisheries department of Suriname and the Fisheries Committee of French Guiana. This in-person meeting allowed ideas for future collaborations to take action on IUU. The idea of conducting joint IUU patrols on the Marowijne River was discussed, and both parties agreed that this would be an excellent first step in collaboration, but that financial support is needed. WWF secured funds for this activity by extending a grant to the Fisheries Department of Suriname to begin IUU patrolling for 2023



COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS GUYANA

SUPPORT TO RAP ENDORSEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION



The National stakeholder workshop for implementing and adapting the RAP was held in Guyana on June 13, 2023, with 13 participants. At this workshop, the national stakeholders indicated their current and planned national efforts that are in alignment with the four respective RAP strategic lines, shared actions taken towards saving leatherback turtles, and outlined the way forward for national adaptation of the RAP. The results of these workshops were presented during the Regional RAP workshop held on June 16, 2023.

RAP ENDORSEMENT

In May 2023, a letter was sent to His Excellency Dr. Irfan Ali, President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, requesting endorsement of the RAP. The letter was also copied to the Vice President, Head of the Protected Areas Commission (PAC) and the Guyana Wildlife Conservation and Management Commission.

NATIONAL PLAN TO COMBAT IUU FISHING (NPOA)

Guyana's National Plan to combat IUU fishing (NPOA) has been drafted by the Fisheries Department with technical support from CRFM (Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism). The draft underwent consultations with relevant government agencies in December 2022. At the request of the Fisheries Department, WWF supported consultations with fishers throughout the administrative regions for their input on the NPOA. WWF had provided a grant to the Fisheries department to organise the validation consultations held on May 12, 2023. The validated final draft will be submitted for Ministerial approval.

- Sea Turtle Monitoring
- The monitoring of sea turtles commenced in March- June in the Shell Beach Protected Area (SBPA) by the Protected Areas Commission (PAC).
- Sea turtle conservation signs erected in Moruca and Mabaruma Sub-Districts.
- Hatchery constructed at the beginning of nesting season to prevent dogs from destroying relocated nests.



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UPDATES TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

LED TURTLE-FRIENDLY LIGHTS INSTALLED IN GRANDE RIVIERE



In June 2023, the Environmental Management Authority (EMA), HADCO Group, Grande Riviere Nature Tour Guides Association (GRNTGA), and the Grande Riviere community worked together to replace existing streetlights in Grande Riviere with NXT Lite LED Turtle Friendly Lights.

The initiative was part of ongoing efforts by the National Sea Turtle Task Force (NSTTF), which is chaired by Mrs. Nadra Nathai-Gyan of the EMA and includes membership by the GRNTGA, to ensure the long-term protection and enhancement of the quality of life experienced by the leatherback turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*) which visit Trinidad's shores annually. Nesting sea turtles at Grande Riviere beach were experiencing the deleterious effect of streetlights; specifically, their nesting patterns were being disturbed by the light pollution from the light waves of regular streetlight units, causing the turtles to become disoriented or lost inland when seeking darker areas to lay their eggs. As such, stakeholder engagement was conducted to explore potential mitigation measures and seventeen turtle-friendly streetlights, which emit a red glow, were installed in the immediate vicinity of the turtle nesting site.

RAP ENDORSEMENT

In May 2023, letters were sent to the Ministers with responsibilities for Planning and Development and Agriculture, Land and Fisheries requesting support for implementing the RAP.

NATIONAL DIALOGUE

In June 2023, national stakeholders were engaged by the EMA to provide input and updates on their national activities aligned with the RAP's strategic lines and actions. This was done in preparation for the Implementation Workshop for the NWA RAP.



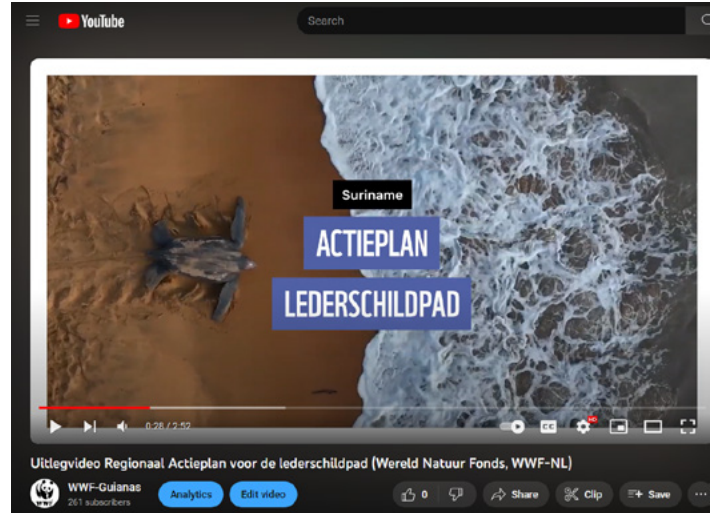
COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS NETHERLANDS

COMMUNICATION

WWF-Netherlands gave extra attention to the RAP by producing a fundraising film aimed at its Dutch members and the wider public. This video explains what the RAP is, what still needs to be done, and why extra funding is required.

In addition, a short thank-you video was produced for all those who have already contributed to establishing the RAP from the Netherlands. The fundraising video can be viewed on the WWF-Guianas Youtube channel.

[Link to video](#)



UPCOMING ACTIVITES

- **June 2023- September 2023:** Developing the dedicated RAP webpage with various communication materials are now available within the RAP. [Link to webpage](#)
- **June – December 2023:** Finalizing the RAP governing body with responsibilities and mandates.
- **July 2023** – ongoing: fundraising activities for the RAP implementation.
- **June 2023** – ongoing: working on obtaining national and regional endorsement of the RAP.

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

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