



NEWSLETTER

REGIONAL NORTHWEST ATLANTIC LEATHERBACK ACTION PLAN (RAP) PROJECT

ISSUE 7 | FEBRUARY 2024 – JULY 2024

This newsletter provides our stakeholders with updates and the next steps of the Regional Northwest Atlantic Leatherback Action Plan (RAP) Project in the region, focusing 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), and WWF-France in French Guiana, WIDECAST and WWF-Netherlands to discuss the progress and implementation of the project. During the WIDECAST AGM a part of the RAP working group had a working group meeting to discuss the RAP governance structure.



WIDECAST ANNUAL MEETING - (11-12 MARCH, COSTA RICA).

The 2024 WIDECAST Annual General Meeting was held at Hotel Bougainvillea in Heredia, Costa Rica on 11-12 March. Nearly 60 participants representing 30 countries throughout the Wider Caribbean, Canada, and the USA were in attendance. Featured speakers from the host country highlighted Costa Rica's National Sea Turtle Strategy, Marine Conservation and MPA Monitoring in Costa Rica, Arribadas in Ostional, Sargassum, and Nesting Trends in Tortuguero National Park. An incredibly educational lab was held during which Didiher Chacón (WIDECAST Country Coordinator, Costa Rica) discussed the nation's approach to trade of illegal sea turtle products – followed by a practicum that put participants' knowledge to the test while examining actual turtle products and imitation products. Conservation and research updates were presented for Grenada, Dominica,

Barbados, Curacao, Haiti, St. Maarten, Suriname, Nicaragua, French Guiana, Dominica, and Mexico. Soraya Wijntuin (WWF Guianas and WIDECAST Country Coordinator in Suriname) presented on IUU activities under the leatherback RAP, during which lessons learned and project updates were discussed. EarthRanger and ShellBank presented on their respective projects and opportunities for partnerships and emerging technologies such as UAV drone technology for night patrols and AI were highlighted. Finally, working groups were convened to discuss solution landscapes for effects of coastal armoring, use of drone technology in sea turtle monitoring, digital data collection platforms (EarthRanger), and in water sea turtle-based tourism. We are looking forward to the 2025 AGM which will be held in March in St. Kitts and Nevis.





SECOND REGIONAL IUU MEETING (11-12 JUNE, SURINAME)



In wrapping up the the Oceans 5, a sponsored project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, WWF-Guianas facilitated the 2nd regional face-to-face meeting on IUU fishing within the Guianas. The meeting was hosted by the Fisheries Department of the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Fisheries of Suriname. The meeting saw representatives from State, Territorial Agencies, fishers, research institutions and environmental organizations and was moderated by the International Monitoring Control and Surveillance (IMCS) Network. The aim of meeting was to continue to explore potential pathways for collaboration that

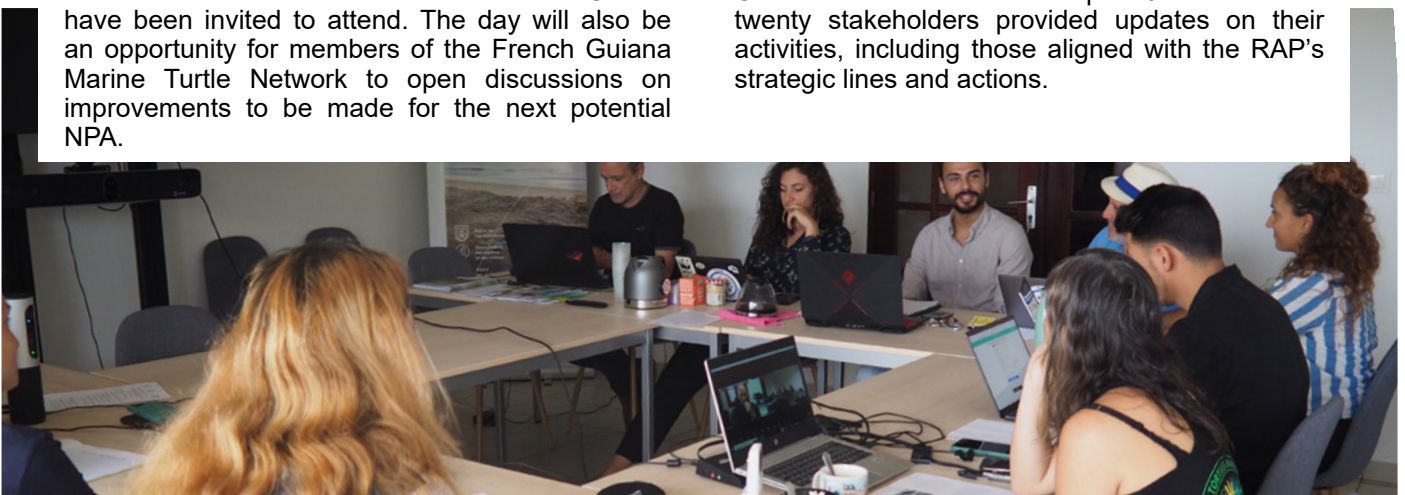
could enhance the efficiency of regional efforts to combat IUU in the Guianas. The meeting provided the opportunity for respective experts from agencies to meet with their respective counterparts to discuss the regional approach to tackling IUU under the thematic areas of data collection and sharing/science, judicial and enforcement. Following the discussions, a draft MoU to further enable cooperation and collaboration on combating IUU fisheries between the Guianas was proposed by participants. Participants will present this to their respective governments for adoption. This is aligned with the RAP's strategic lines and actions.

COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS FRENCH GUIANA

NATIONAL DIALOGUE

As reported in the previous Newsletter, the Sea Turtle National Action Plan (NAP) in French Guiana ran for ten years, from 2014 to 2023. The ACTeon consultancy firm was selected to carry out the evaluation. Their work will be presented in person on September 12, 2024. All organizations involved in marine turtle conservation in French Guiana have been invited to attend. The day will also be an opportunity for members of the French Guiana Marine Turtle Network to open discussions on improvements to be made for the next potential NPA.

From February to April 2024, a person was recruited to retrieve all the data on sea turtle nesting tracks counted in French Guiana over the last 45 years (1979-2024), then format and bank them on the TORSOOI platform. The working group on knowledge improvement or Scientific Committee was also held in April 2024. More than twenty stakeholders provided updates on their activities, including those aligned with the RAP's strategic lines and actions.





MONITORING NESTING ACTIVITIES

Since January 2024, 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. This year's leatherback turtle numbers were lower than last year's throughout French Guiana. On the Cayenne/ Rémire-Montjoly nesting site, where 90% of this year's clutches are concentrated, 1,312 nests have been counted, compared with 1,583 on the same date last year.

CONTINUED INNOVATION TO REDUCE THE RISK OF BYCATCH



Two innovative bycatch reduction projects are currently being implemented by WWF France and the Fisheries Committee (CRPMEM) in French Guiana: The PALICA 3 project, launched last January, is continuing, while the YANA RIBA project was also launched at the beginning of the year. The voluntary no-fishing zone that was first set up in 2020 as part of the ARRIBA project was implemented again this year, it focuses primarily on olive ridley but can also benefit leatherbacks.

SECOND YEAR OF EXISTENCE FOR THE 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 last year to the deployment of a natural hatchery on this beach. Poaching, erosion, and predation by dogs are the main threats. To counter these, specially trained staff are responsible for moving and securing leatherback eggs in the hatchery throughout the egg-laying season. The nests remain in the sand throughout the incubation period and under constant protection until emergence to maximize hatching success. It has been reinstalled for the second year running, in response to the ongoing threats to the site. In addition, the hatchery also hosted special events to welcome the general public, introduce them to the project and raise their awareness of the worrying situation of leatherback turtles on the site.





COMMUNICATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

An HND class was involved in carrying out a survey of users of the nesting sites. The objective was to estimate their level of knowledge about sea turtles, as well as the threats they face locally. The ultimate aim was to be able to compare these results with a similar study carried out 10 years earlier, and thus estimate the effectiveness of RTMG's awareness-raising actions. A participatory network was also set up to encourage regular walkers to share their observations of Kourou's beaches. A total of 15 people took part this season. Numerous awareness-raising events for the general public were held in May and June (Nature Festival, Ocean Week, etc.).

Finally, the latest RTMG newsletter was released in July 2024 and highlights the actions implemented by French Guiana stakeholders with an article on the RAP.



COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS SURINAME

IUU PATROLS



The Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) activities of the Fisheries Department Suriname to combat IUU, which officially started on November 7, 2023, continued during this period. In total, 6 patrol missions were conducted from November 2023 – February 2024, with 56 boats encountered and 4 IUU occurrences detected. The patrols in Marowijne were conducted in collaboration with the French fisheries committee, CRPMEM (Regional Maritime Committee for Fisheries and Aquaculture, based in French Guiana) and the Maritime Police and the other patrols only with the Maritime Police. The initiation of this transboundary initiative was with WWFNL funding.

The patrolling continued in Suriname by the Ministry of Defence in collaboration with the Maritime Police and resulted in the arrest and deportation of 7 illegal fishermen to Guyana. This transboundary initiative was funded by WWF-NL.

Link to article: [Joint effort against IUU fishing in the Guianas](#)



COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS | SURINAME

BYCATCH DATA COLLECTION FOR GILL NET FLEET

In January 2024, the marine turtle interaction monitoring program started a part of the grant with the fisheries department Suriname. This is done through the implementation of a fisher self-sampling program until September 2024, whereby 5 captains in the driftnet fishery volunteered to record their catches, bycatches and discards in an electronic format. The data is entered digitally on a tablet, using an offline form created in KoboToolbox. By the end of June 2024, 444 hauls (fishing activities) were monitored in the driftnet fleet during 22 fishing trips. All hauls caught commercial (retained) fish. Sharks were captured in 164 of the 444 hauls (36.9 % of the hauls) and rays were captured in 391 of the 444 hauls (88.5%). In 14 hauls (3.2%), marine turtles were

captured while marine mammals were captured in 11 hauls (2.5%) of all hauls.

DRAFTING OF THE NATIONAL PLAN OF ACTIONS (NPOA) ON IUU

Through financial support of Oceans 5, a sponsored project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, WWF-Guianas has supported the Fisheries department Suriname with drafting the National plan of Actions (NPOA) on illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. The first activity started in January 2024 with the planning of the consultations and the drafting of the NPOA-IUU. In total of 5 consultations were held till end of June. At the end of July, a draft NPOA-IUU is expected to be shared with stakeholders for validation shared with stakeholders for validation in August 2024.

TOUR GUIDE TRAINING COMMEWIJNE



On March 19, 2024, the 3rd annual sustainable sea turtle tourism training for tour guides Commewijne and United Tour guides Suriname (UTGS) was held at Plantage Resort Frederiksdorp. There were 28 attendees, and the training was for new tour guides and tour guides who needed to renew their sea turtle tour guide badge. This continued the collaboration between the Plantage Resort Frederiksdorp, the Nature Conservation Division (NCD) of the Suriname Forest Service (LBB) of the Ministry of Land Policy and Forest Management (GBB), WWF-Guianas, and Commissariaat Commewijne. All the participants had to pay a small registration fee to the Plantage Resort Frederiksdorp. During this nesting season training, one tour guide's badge was revoked for not following the rules.



COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS | SURINAME

SMART FOR SEA TURTLES

The effort to implement the Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART) pilot at Galibi for Sea turtles and jaguars, has resulted in the signing in March 2024 of the partnership MOU with the partners Nature Conservation Division (NCD), Stidunal (Community-based organisation in Galibi), WWF and the NZCS/CMO (a department of the Anton de Kom University) with a duration of 2-years.



HATCHERY TRAINING BRAAMSPUNT

Due to the increased erosion and flooding at Braamspunt, there was funding secured through the small impact sea turtle funds supported by WWF-Indonesia to pilot hatcheries for Braamspunt from June – September 2024. On June 13-15, sea turtle nets transplantation training was provided by two trainers of Kwata association from French Guiana to 5 attendees of the Surinamese government officials from the Nature Conservation Division (NCD) of the Suriname Forest Service (LBB) of the Ministry of Land Policy and Forest Management (GBB), one local data collector and a tour guide. On June 15, a social media reel dedicated to the hatchery training and sea turtle week was released by WWF-Guianas.



BLUE OCEANS TALK IN SURINAME

On 29 February 2024, the Oceans coordinator, Soraya Wijntuin, was invited to present the projects related to Oceans at the Suriname Blue Talks Conference organized by the French Embassy in Suriname and Guyana, together with the United Nations in Suriname. This also showed the impact of WWF Guianas by collaborating with various partners and that WWF is seen as a relevant stakeholder for ocean-related matters by the French embassy in Suriname.



MONITORING AND ENFORCEMENT ON NESTING BEACHES.

The enforcement activities on both nesting beaches were conducted by the Nature Conservation Division (NCD) of the Suriname Forest Service (LBB) of the Ministry of Land Policy and Forest Management (GBB). The data collection started in May and will end in July 2024. Most poaching is happening at the remote beaches of Galibi, 74 green turtle nests were poached. No reports of poachers have been made.

SPECIES	ENGLISH NAMES	NESTS LAID	TOTAL HATCHED NEST
<i>Dermochelys coriacea</i>	Leatherback	180	20
<i>Chelonia mydas</i>	Green turtle	500	42
<i>Lepidochelys olivacea</i>	Olive ridley	9	0

Nest data sea turtles Suriname of Galibi and Braamspunt from May – June 2024



COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS | TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

REBYC-3 CLME+

The REBYC-III project is actively addressing the challenge of bycatch in tropical Large Marine Ecosystem fisheries through a multi-faceted approach. A meeting was held in February 2024 with the NSTTF and researchers to discuss the development of surveys for the project titled “Determine and address causes for leatherback decline in the Northwest Atlantic”.

The first survey, titled “Assessment of Marine Megafauna By-Catch in Artisanal Fisheries in Trinidad and Tobago through Local Ecological Knowledge (LEK)”, was expanded to target megafauna, including turtles and mammals, a need identified by the REBYC-III project. The survey was drafted by the University of the West Indies (UWI), and funding was secured in July 2024.

Additionally, REBYC-III is promoting alternative fishing methods, such as trolling and potentially

bottom set longline (palangue), to provide viable substitutes for gillnetting. Beyond developing and testing new technologies, REBYC-III is committed to improving legal, governance, and management frameworks and fostering behavioural changes through socioeconomic initiatives to mitigate the adverse effects of these measures.

Other work to support sea turtle conservation and management include:

- The first phase of trials of net illumination gear using green light to explore cost-effective alternatives for broader adoption and legislative integration. This was conducted in April 2024 by Ecolibrium Inc. and supported by the NSTTF.
- Teal Guetschow concluded her second year of data collection and research on the density effects of hatching success for leatherback sea turtles at Grand Riviere in July 2024.

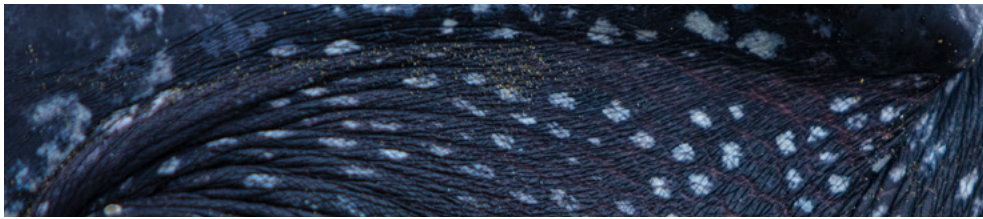
SEA TURTLE SIGNAGE INSTALLATION

Signs are being installed on key beaches as part of an NSTTF and Environmental Management Authority initiative to promote public awareness of the restrictions related to turtle nesting beaches. Signs were erected at Tyrico Beach, on the north coast of Trinidad, in June 2024, and approvals are being sought for additional signage to be installed on key nesting beaches. These measures aim to enhance awareness and protection for nesting turtles and bolster monitoring and enforcement across these vital locations.

SEA TURTLE RECOVERY ACTION PLAN (STRAP)

The revision of the Sea Turtle Recovery Action Plan (STRAP), spearheaded by the EMA and supported by the National Sea Turtle Task Force (NSTTF), is underway. The revised STRAP is intended to guide the conservation and management of the five (5) sea turtles designated as Environmentally Sensitive Species (ESS) under the Section 41 of the Environmental Management Act (Ch. 35:05), Legal Notice Nos. 88-92, 2014. These are the Leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*), Loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*), Green (*Chelonia mydas*), Hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) and Olive Ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) turtles. It provides a multistakeholder approach to addressing the challenges encountered in sea turtle management. It seeks to address the current gaps in national sea turtle management since the publication of the previous STRAP in 2010.





COUNTRY HIGHLIGHTS **GUYANA**

BIODEV2030 PHASE II PROJECT

WWF-Guianas is currently implementing the project BIODEV2030 Phase II which aims to contribute to the global and national processes of stopping biodiversity loss by 2030 and restoring biodiversity by 2050. Under Phase I, BIODEV2030 supported governments in assessing the impacts of productive sectors on biodiversity and assisting governments in the formulation of voluntary biodiversity commitments and priority actions for mainstreaming biodiversity across productive sectors.

The mining and agriculture sectors were initially identified as being priority sectors to implement BIODEV Phase II, however, these sectors were not able to develop voluntary commitments to support further project development. During the consultation

process of Phase I, the fisheries sector was identified as a priority and thus, BIODEV Phase II will focus on supporting sustainable fisheries through the public sector policy reform. The project will be implemented in both Guyana and Suriname, however, the majority of project implementation will be done in Guyana.

To achieve this and building on the experience of Phase I, a multi-stakeholder dialogue platform will be established, to help facilitate effective and constructive collaboration between stakeholders to support policy reform within the fisheries sector. The multi-stakeholder platform function through national dialogues will be held both virtually and in-person. The first national dialogue is scheduled for September 2024, and we are in the process of recruiting a consultant to support facilitation of the first dialogue in Guyana.

FUNDRAISING UPDATES

THE GREAT OCEAN (GUIANAS REGIONAL ACTION FOR A THRIVING OCEAN)

The project proposal designed by the consultants Farah Mukhida, Louise Soanes and Tomas Willems, named The GREAT Ocean (Guianas Regional Action for a Thriving Ocean) was submitted to the French Agency for Development (AFD) in Paris. This project will support civil society organizations to improve their knowledge of IUU and the impact on marine ecosystems, how to take action against IUU, and how to promote suitable fishing practices. The overall objective is to improve the survival of emblematic marine species along the Guianas continental shelf, with priority given to the Maroni Estuary (the border river between Suriname and French Guiana). When the project is accepted, we aim to start January 2025 with a duration of three years.

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

NATIONAL DIALOGUE

- + First national dialogue under the BIODEV2030 Phase II project on proposing policy reform that supports sustainable fisheries is scheduled for September 19, 2024 in Guyana.
- + Finalizing the hatchery project in Suriname and sharing the results
- + Engaging stakeholders for finalizing the Oceans5 regional IUU project in French Guiana, Suriname and Guyana end of August 2024
- + Developing communication material with the fisheries department in Suriname and Guyana to simplify the licensing conditions for fisherfolk
- + Implementation of the Sea Turtle Recovery Action Plan (STRAP) Manual project in Suriname
- + Circulation of a zero draft for stakeholder consultations for STRAP in Trinidad and Tobago
- + Ecolibrium Inc. is scheduled to return to Trinidad during June and September 2024 for the second phase of the net illumination trials. The marine megafauna survey is expected to be finalised and executed in the coming months

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR SUGGESTIONS, PLEASE REACH OUT TO ONE OF OUR COUNTRY REPRESENTATIVES

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