



NEWSLETTER

REGIONAL NORTHWEST ATLANTIC

LEATHERBACK ACTION PLAN PROJECT

ISSUE 3 | JANUARY - JUNE 2022

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

1. 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 & Tobago, French Office of Biodiversity (OFB) and WWF-France in French Guiana and WWF-Netherlands to discuss the progress on the project.

2. DEVELOPMENT PROCESS OF THE RAP

THREAT SURVEY

The [Threat survey](#) conducted by Dr. Karen Eckert (WIDECASST) was finalized after the peer-review round at the regional meeting held in November 2022. 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.

EXPERTS ROUNDS RAP

From February – March 2022, there were expert stakeholders feedback rounds held to improve the draft RAP. These feedback rounds were divided per strategic line.

The four (4) strategic lines set in the RAP are:

- Legislation and Enforcement;
- Protection and Management of Critical Habitats;
- Community Engagement and
- Scientific Data Needs.



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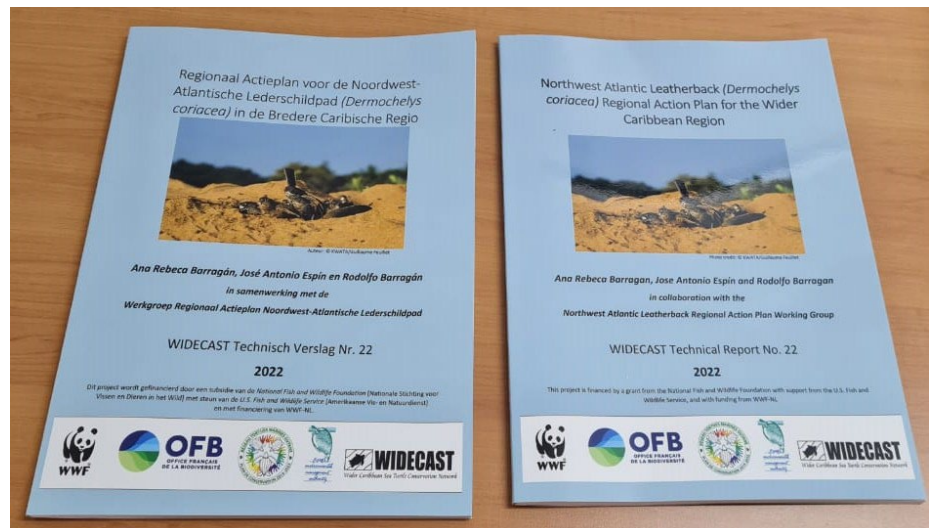
UPDATES

2. DEVELOPMENT PROCESS OF THE RAP (CONTINUED)

FINALIZING RAP

The RAP for the NWA Leatherback Sea Turtle subpopulation was developed using an enhanced regional approach in which key stakeholders throughout the Wider Caribbean Region (with a focus on the Guianas and Trinidad & Tobago nesting populations) provided input into the definition of priority actions to address causal factors in the decline of this subpopulation in recent decades. It provides specific guidelines towards increasing community engagement and improved legislation which, combined with access to better scientific knowledge, will support and enhance the positive impact of improved practices for the protection and management of critical habitat. The RAP also describes the ideal structure for governance and funding. The RAP was finalized in June 2022, and it is being translated in Dutch, Spanish and French.

The RAP can be accessed via: [Northwest Atlantic Leatherback Regional Action Plan \(Barragan et al. 2022\).pdf](#)



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

In October 2021, the three (3) studies (see the links below) 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 have provided a detailed analysis of the priorities at the national level for the NWA leatherback sea turtle subpopulation by having consultations with the national stakeholders in the respective countries. These three (3) studies were finalized in February and March 2022 and incorporated in the RAP.

The studies can be accessed via:

- Guyana: [National Priorities NWA Leatherback Sea Turtle Guyana](#)
- Suriname: [National Priorities NWA Leatherback Sea Turtle Suriname](#)
- Trinidad & Tobago: [National Priorities NWA Leatherback Sea Turtle Trinidad & Tobago](#)



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UPDATES

4. REGIONAL VALIDATION STAKEHOLDER MEETING

The Validation Workshop for the construction of the NWA Leatherback Regional Action Plan (RAP) on May 10-11, 2022 was organized by WWF-Guianas in collaboration with the following partners: EMA in Trinidad & Tobago, OFB, Réseau Tortues Marines Guyane, WWF-Canada, WWF-Netherlands, and WWF-France. The objective was to review and familiarize stakeholders of French Guiana, Suriname, Guyana, and Trinidad & Tobago with the strategic lines and actions that were developed for the NWA Leatherback Regional Action Plan. The workshop also enabled participants to provide feedback, discuss and agree on activities to implement the plan in each focus country, including possible dates for a joint start of implementation.

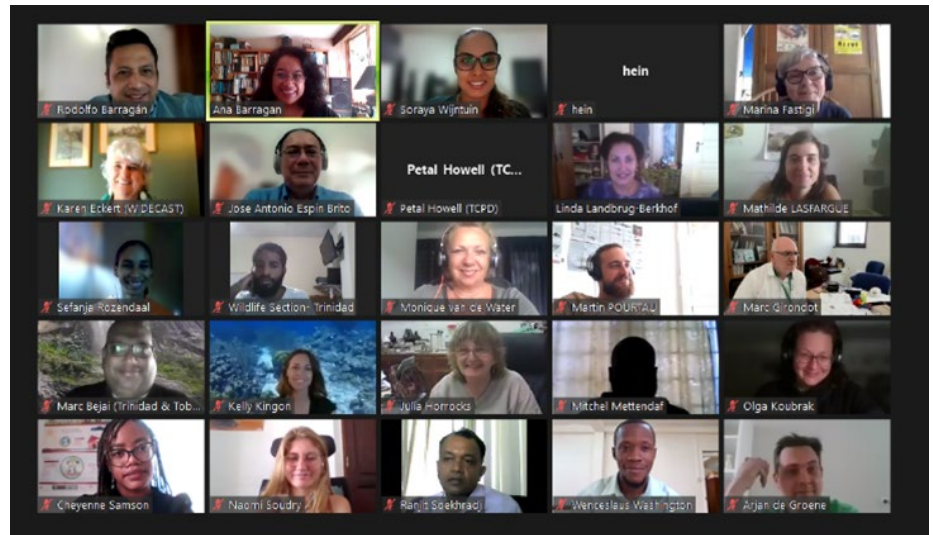
Approximately 50 participants attended from Suriname, Guyana, French Guiana, Trinidad & Tobago, Canada, the Netherlands, France, the United States of America, Bonaire, Barbados and Grenada in this two-day event.

During the two (2) days the critical and constructive feedback from the stakeholders was gathered in order to adjust the RAP to their needs along with obtaining stakeholder approval. On the second day, the stakeholders voted on the endorsement of the actions in the RAP using Slido. Actions in the RAP were fully endorsed by the voters, receiving 100% of the votes.

The [full meeting report](#) has been summarized and translated into French and Dutch.

Summaries of the meeting report are available in:

- [French](#)
- [Dutch](#)
- [English](#)





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UPDATES

5. HIGHLIGHTS PER COUNTRY

FRENCH GUIANA

Since January, regular sea turtle patrols have been conducted in the main nesting areas of Yalimapo beach by the Amana Nature Reserve, in Kourou by the OFB and in Cayenne/Rémire-Montjoly by Kwata non-governmental organization (NGO). **More than 800 leatherback nests** have been counted so far.

As part of the Sea Turtle National Action Plan (NAP), two (2) working group meetings were held on January 28, 2022 (gathering 15 people representing 11 entities and discussing mitigation of threats at sea) and March 23, 2022 (gathering 17 people representing 12 entities and discussing knowledge improvement).

In addition to these working groups, a steering committee was held on April 26, 2022, gathering 18 members of the marine turtle network (24 people in total). This meeting focused largely on the future direction of the NAP, in anticipation of the end of the current plan ending in 2023.

From the point of view of awareness and animations, the first half of the year was marked by numerous meetings with the general public, including but not only the International Sea Turtle Day and the European Week for Sustainable Development. All these actions can be found in the network's recently published [newsletter](#).

The international cooperation was also marked by the rereading and French translation of the RAP and the summary of the validation workshop report.



SURINAME

- WWF conducted a data collection and passive integrated transponder (PIT) tag training in Suriname on the Braamspunt sea turtle nesting beach from June 1 – 3, 2022. The main focus of the exercise was to introduce PIT tagging of leatherback sea turtles to the participants. Other practical sea turtle nesting site monitoring techniques were discussed, and practical exercises were conducted in sea turtle biology, nest excavation, triangulation, and beach profiling. The exercises involved officers from the Protected Areas Commission in Guyana and officers from the Nature Conservation Division in Suriname and the trainer came from Trinidad & Tobago;

- A report entitled, "Northwest Atlantic leatherback sea turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) capture-mark-recapture analysis: regional summary and survival estimates for Trinidad & Tobago and the Guianas" was developed by Dr. Bryan Wallace and Dr. Amanda Kissel to explore potential demographic drivers of the observed decline in leatherback nest abundance. In support of this study, long-term capture-mark-recapture (CMR) data were collected from Wider Caribbean nesting beach monitoring programs that use unique identifier tags (i.e., metal flipper tags and/or PIT tags).



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UPDATES

5. HIGHLIGHTS PER COUNTRY (CONTINUED)

SURINAME (CONTINUED)

- Finalisation of the report “Analysis of the Priorities at the National Level for Suriname, for the Northwest Atlantic (NWA) Leatherback Sea Turtle Subpopulation as Part of the Regional Action Plan for the Leatherback” by the consultancy team Environmental Services & Support N.V. (ESS) and was submitted to WWF-Guianas on March 4, 2022;
- By the end of February 2022, the training in use of GPS devices and collecting monitoring data of sea turtles was held by the Nature Conservation Division (NCD) to the community-based organization of Galibi, STIDUNAL;
- On March 23- 24, 2022, WWF-Guianas presented the RAP and the process of developing the RAP with the working group during the WIDECASST’s 2022 Annual General Meeting;
- From March – June 2022 there were monitoring and enforcement activities on both nesting beaches (Braamspunt and Galibi) being conducted by the NCD and Stidunal and
- On June 8, 2022 there was a sea turtle training for boatmen, and tour guides of Commewijne held at Plantage resort Frederiksdorp, there were 53 attendees. This was a new collaboration between the Plantage resort Frederiksdorp, the Nature Conservation Division (NCD) and WWF-Guianas.



GUYANA

- The monitoring of sea turtles commenced in February in the Shell Beach Protected Area (SBPA) by the Protected Areas Commission (PAC);
- On February 24, training was provided for the rangers from Mangrove Department on Sea Turtle Identification and monitoring. They will be monitoring and reporting activities outside of the SBPA and
- Finalisation of the report “Analysis of the Priorities at the National Level for Guyana, for the Northwest Atlantic (NWA) Leatherback Sea Turtle Subpopulation as Part of the Regional Action Plan for the Leatherback” by the consultant Nelanie La Cruz, which was submitted to WWF-Guianas on March 4, 2022.



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UPDATES

5. HIGHLIGHTS PER COUNTRY (CONTINUED)

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

- Finalisation of the report “Analysis of the Priorities at the National Level for Trinidad & Tobago, for the Northwest Atlantic (NWA) Leatherback Sea Turtle Subpopulation as Part of the Regional Action Plan for the Leatherback” by the consultancy team (Darshan Narang, Niamh Vaughan and Shivam Mahadeo) and submission to the EMA and WWF on February 28, 2022;
- Regular sea turtle patrols were conducted by the Forestry Division on beaches during the nesting season, which commenced in March. Even though no funds were received for community conservation groups to conduct sea turtle patrols, some community groups voluntarily conducted patrols at key nesting sites on both islands;
- For the ongoing leatherback bycatch reduction project, which seeks to advance efforts to reduce leatherback bycatch and promote sustainable fishing in Trinidad & Tobago, Bryan Wallace (Ecolibrium Inc.), Jesse Senko (Arizona State University), Teal Guetschow (Arizona State University) and Jeff Gearhart (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Southeast Fisheries Science Center), conducted their first visit to Trinidad during the period April 3-10, 2022. The objectives for this visit were to connect with stakeholders from government, non-governmental organisations (inclusive of National Sea Turtle Task Force [NSTTF] members), and the fishing sector to introduce and discuss the project and to begin identifying plans for promoting turtle-friendly fishing methods that also support livelihoods derived from artisanal fishing practices;
- A representative from Trinidad & Tobago (Kevin Muhammad, Grande Riviere Nature Tour Guides’ Association/Turtle Village Trust) conducted training in June for wildlife officers in Suriname in aspects of data collection: PIT tagging, beach profiling using three (3) different techniques, triangulation, and leatherback turtle biology.
- A government representative from the EMA (Danielle Lewis-Clarke) attended:
 - The 15th Meeting of the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC) Consultative Committee of Experts on March 03-04, 2022 via video-conference as an observer;
 - The second part of the IAC 10th Conference of the Parties in Panama City, Panama on June 15-17, 2022. Ms. Lewis-Clarke attended as an observer to learn more about the IAC and bring Trinidad & Tobago closer to signing on as a member party and
 - WIDECAS’s 2022 Annual General Meeting, which was conducted virtually during March 23-24, 2022.





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UPDATES

5. HIGHLIGHTS PER COUNTRY (CONTINUED)

CANADA

- Canada is currently undergoing work for the final year of the HSP (Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk) funded program. Through this work, Canada is working with partners Whale and Release Strandings NL and Fish Food and Allied Workers to create a documentary short film. This film will highlight the progress made from the project thus far, act as an educational piece for the NWA Leatherback sea turtle population and raise awareness on key threats such as entanglements;
- Recently, Canada created an animation video outlining how to properly interact with Leatherback sea turtles and other cetaceans that become entangled in fishing gear. This video was posted on YouTube in June and can be found here: <https://youtu.be/lvXk62QNk9I>. Two (2) factsheets were also created and are available online here: [Sea Turtles](#) & [Whales & Other Cetaceans](#)
- Canada can play an important role on the international stage in promoting conservation efforts for this species, so WWF-Canada is also advocating for Canadian participation and promotion in international agreements and conventions that promote sea turtle protection and recovery. This includes the IAC. The IAC is an inter-governmental treaty which provides legal framework for countries in American continent to take action to benefit sea turtle species. WWF-Canada would like to engage Canada, discuss their involvement with the IAC, and recommend a more active role in the IAC to better conserve and protect Canadian sea turtles. Canada's collaboration internationally, for the conservation and protection of Leatherback sea turtles, would also satisfy conditions of the SARA Leatherback Sea Turtle Recovery Strategy and Action Plan. Expected outcomes include a meeting with the Minister and follow-up briefings.

6. LEATHERBACK ANIMATION MOVIE ACTIVITIES AND LAUNCHES

- In Suriname from May – June, there was collaboration with the District Commissaris of Commewijne, education inspection Commewijne, NCD and WWF-Guianas for awareness sessions on the importance of sea turtles held in five (5) elementary schools in which the animation was shown at the end of each session and a coloring contest was held per school.
- We want to announce that on request of the region that the leatherback animation movie has been translated into Spanish and is available on Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XNBceH_K4CE





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COMMUNICATION MATERIALS

7. FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

WWF-Netherlands have reached out to donors for initial funding for the implementation phase of the RAP and were able to secure funding for one (1) year to start with the implementation of RAP as indicated during the regional validation workshop.

The regional working group will continue to identify donors and there will be a consultant attracted to develop together with our stakeholders and partners a 5-year proposal including workplan and budget for the implementation of the RAP.



UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

- July 2022:** Finish the translated RAP in French, Dutch and Spanish;
- July 2022 - November 2022:** Organizing and establishment of the RAP governing body with responsibilities and mandates;
- July 2022 - December 2022:** Developing a 5-year proposal including workplan with roles and responsibilities for implementation of the RAP in the joining countries and budget;
- July 2022 - March 2023:** Working with WIDECAST on receiving Regional endorsement of the RAP by Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) Protocol and IAC;
- November 2022 - March 2023:** National workshops in the Guianas, Trinidad & Tobago for the adaption and implementation of the RAP;
- January 2023 - 30 June 2023:** Pilot in one (1) of the selected nesting countries where action is most urgent to reduce fisheries bycatch identified based on finalized regional surveys and the regional action plan.

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

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