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NEWSLETTER

REGIONAL NORTHWEST ATLANTIC LEATHERBACK ACTION PLAN PROJECT

ISSUE 4 | JULY 2022 - JANUARY 2023

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

During the working group meetings, it was decided to postpone National Workshops in the Guianas, Trinidad and Tobago for the adoption and implementation of the RAP to March – May 2023.

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RAP

SETTING UP GOVERNING BODY OF THE RAP

To define process and composition of the RAP governing body, the consultant Olga Koubrak (SeaLife Law, and WIDECAST-Canada) was hired from August 2022 through February 2023. The consultant is organizing and establishing the RAP governing body with responsibilities and mandates while assisting in designing the regional workshop. To assist in this important development, a governing advisory committee was established which consists of government representatives from the four countries and key experts.



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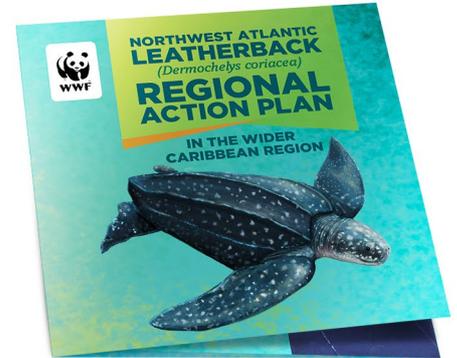
UPDATES

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RAP (CONTINUED)

DISTRIBUTING RAP

The RAP reports have been printed in multiple languages in the period of November 2022-January 2023

To make the RAP more understandable for external partners, a RAP brochure has also been developed which highlights specific and important information which is described in the RAP. The Policy Letter will be sent together with the printed RAP and the RAP brochure.



ENDORSEMENT RAP

The RAP working group prepared a policy brief for national endorsement of the RAP. The letter will be finalised within the first quarter of 2023 and distributed to the respective Presidents/Ministers of Environment or Wildlife of Canada, The Netherlands, France, Guyana, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago. The letter will be sent by WWF Offices within each respective country, with the exception of Trinidad and Tobago and France in which case the Environmental Management Authority (EMA) in Trinidad and Tobago and the French Biodiversity Agency (OFB) in French Guiana, will send their letter.

DEVELOPING RAP PROPOSAL

From August 2022 – March 2023, the consultant, Farah Mukida, (Anguilla National Trust, and WIDECAS-ANGUILLA) has been working on the development of the 5-year proposal, workplan and budget for the implementation of the RAP in part by consulting with partners and members of the regional working group.



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3. HIGHLIGHTS PER COUNTRY

FRENCH GUIANA

- The first 2 months of the 2nd semester allowed us to finish the different monitoring campaigns of sea turtle nests on all the French Guyanese coastline. The 2022 Final Report is available in the recently published January [newsletter](#) of the Marine Turtle Network in French Guiana (RTMG). Leatherbacks still show an alarming decline in the western part of the territory (with only 73 nests recorded on Yalimapo beach, once known as the largest leatherback turtle nesting site in the world), but an encouraging rebound in egg-laying is observed in the eastern beaches (828 nests recorded in Cayenne and Rémire-Montjoly).



- Last October, RTMG members published a press release concerning the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) foreign fishing, which is believed to be largely responsible for the observed decline of sea turtles in French Guiana. This message is mainly focused on this decline. Through this motion, the RTMG wishes to alert the territory and the decision-makers, and to solicit all available help. Tightening the legislative framework protecting marine turtles, developing tools to fight IUU fishing, and strengthening transboundary cooperation are the objectives.
- From November 14 to 18, 2022, the 4th edition of the French Marine Turtle Group (GTMF) symposium took place in La Grande Motte (Hérault, France). About a hundred experts involved in the science and conservation of sea turtles and their habitats from metropolitan France and seven overseas departments and communities were present. The National Action Plan for Sea Turtles in French Guiana (PNATMG) was presented, including the results of several years of work to improve knowledge, reduce

threats on land and at sea, raise awareness and educate people about the environment, and promote cross-border cooperation.

- From August 2022 to January 2023, several working groups took place and allowed the different members of the Sea Turtle Network in French Guiana to define the orientations to come in 2023 (last year of the current Action Plan) regarding the fight against threats on land and at sea, environmental education, and data management.
- From the point of view of communication and environmental education, the second half of the year was marked by numerous meetings with the general public (e.g., school activities, public events such as the Science Festival, awareness-raising events with various socio-economic actors in French Guiana and the deployment of new tools (e.g., launch of a web series, as well as the development of an educational video game about sea turtles in which a reference is made about the RAP, including a link to the WWF Guianas website).



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SURINAME

- From March – July 2022 there were monitoring and enforcement activities on both nesting beaches (Braamspunt and Galibi) conducted by the Nature Conservation Division (NCD) and Stidunal. In total, there were 425 leatherback nests laid on both beaches. A total of 21 poachers were arrested by NCD, police and army on both beaches in Suriname. At Braamspunt, there was no poaching activity after the arrest of the first five poachers. The poachers were prosecuted and received jail time.
- From April – August 2022, a socio-economic study was conducted in Galibi to gather the necessary baseline information to enable effective conservation and sustainable development interventions at the community level. This was undertaken in the context of exploring causal factors in the poaching of sea turtle eggs and possible solutions. The study recommended that attention be given to developing alternative income generation projects in Galibi, increasing community engagement and participation in local development processes, increased equity in ownership and sustainability of projects, the continuation of ICT training courses, and nature education activities for the youth.
- From August – November 2022, the Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART) feasibility study for the Galibi site was conducted. The site had been identified suitable to implement SMART for both jaguars and sea turtles and that it would be feasible to pilot in 2023.
- In October 2022, WWF-Guianas engaged the Nature Conservation Division (NCD) in its representation on the RAP Advisory Committee and they have accepted.
- On October 18 and 19, 2022, there was an Inception SMART workshop held, this was a hybrid workshop with presentations of the WWF SMART trainers of Brazil, Buthan and Cambodia and the results of the feasibility study for SMART in Suriname. The SMART tool was identified as useful to improve data collection and reporting in the field and to improve datasharing.
- As a result of the SMART workshop, a SMART training of trainers was held in Galibi and PBM from November 26 to December 2, 2022 with the SMART trainer from WWF-Vietnam. A total of 24 persons from the Nature Conservation Division (NCD), Stidunal, local community data collectors, the National Zoological collection of Anton de Kom University Suriname and WWF are trained in SMART use for data management, collection, and interpretation.
- From November 2022 – January 2023, a MoU between WWF, NZCS and Stidunal and NCD was developed to pilot SMART for 2023 and 2024 in Suriname for both jaguars and sea turtles.
- From December 5, 2022 – March 5, 2023, both visitor centers in Galibi and Braamspunt will be renovated and upgraded to feature informative and interactive material for community, visitors and for the youth to enhance awareness for conservation of jaguars and sea turtles. This is done in collaboration with the NCD and Stidunal.





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SURINAME (CONTINUED)

- From October 2022 – January 2023, the awareness strategy was improved and updated together with NCD for the schools.
- On December 12, 2022, an awareness session of WWF and NCD was conducted on sea turtles and marine mammals for the Suriname river dredging company, Boskalis, in collaboration with De Boer as part of the Marine Mammal observation mitigations of the EIA.



GUYANA

- Monitoring the main nesting sites within the Shell Beach Protected Area (SBPA) was conducted during the period March 01, 2022 to August 15, 2022 by the Protected Areas Commission (PAC). Due to the rate of erosion at the primary beach, the relocation of eggs was the main part of this year's monitoring effort.
- During monitoring activities, the Knowledge Exchange Programme implemented last year by the PAC to develop local capacity and work effectively with partners was sustained with other key conservation organizations (e.g., the Guyana Marine Conservation Society, South Rupununi Conservation Society, Kanuku Mountains Protected Area). Representatives from the conservation organisations were given an opportunity to work for a 2-4-week period at Almond Beach, which allowed them to be involved in the sea turtle monitoring activities. Participation in the monitoring activities at Almond Beach by the various organisations were as follows:

1. The University of Guyana participated in the monitoring activities during the period April 22 to May 6, 2023;
2. The Department of Fisheries and the Guyana Wildlife Conservation and Management Commission (GWCMC) participated monitoring activities during the period May 7 to May 20, 2023;
3. The South Rupununi Conservation Society (SRCS) and the Kanuku Mountains Protected Area participated in monitoring activities during the period May 20 to June 3, 2023; and

4. The Guyana Marine Conservation Society (GMCS) participated in monitoring activities during the period April to July 2, 2023.

- During the monitoring period, wooden boxes were created and placed around relocated nests to prevent depredation of turtle nests by dogs. The three families that still reside on the beach have a total of five dogs, the pups that came at the end of April were taken from the beach in mid-June.
- There were 209 recorded nests for 2022 nesting season (135 Green turtles, 65 Leatherback, 8 Hawksbill and 1 Olive Ridley). Additionally, of the 209 nests, 174 nests were relocated due to rapid erosion of the beach.



- An introductory stakeholder meeting was held virtually on September 16, 2022, with WWF consultants. The aim of the meeting was to reacquaint stakeholders with the RAP and to garner their inputs on the roles and responsibilities as these relate to the conservation of



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GUYANA (CONTINUED)

leatherback populations, already-initiated RAP activities, national priorities for RAP implementation, and funding to support RAP implementation (already secured and/or identified). A second meeting was held on September 20, 2022 to accommodate key stakeholders who could not attend the meeting on September 16.

- WWF-Guyana has been engaging the Guyana Wildlife Conservation and Management Commission (GWCMC) on its representation on the advisory committee for the RAP governance structure.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

- Signs were erected on two prohibited sea turtle nesting beaches in July 2022 as part of a National Sea Turtle Task Force (NSTTF) initiative.
- An introductory stakeholder consultation, held virtually on September 15, 2022, with WWF consultants: Farah Mukhida and Louise Soanes. The consultation sought to discuss: stakeholder roles and responsibilities as it relates to the conservation of leatherback sea turtle populations; already-initiated RAP activities; national priorities for RAP implementation; funding to support RAP implementation (already secured and/or identified); and any other issues or concerns that have presented themselves since the RAP has been finalised and validated.
- The Cabinet Note recommending that T&T join the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC) was finalised and submitted to the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Planning and Development for consideration/action by the Minister in November 2022.
- Government representatives from the EMA (Danielle Lewis-Clarke and Justine Dolabaille) attended the 19th meeting of the IAC Scientific Committee, held virtually from November 07-09, 2022, as observers.
- 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.), Eric Diaddorio (Fisheries Specialist), and Teal Guetschow (Arizona State University) conducted a second visit to



© Nature Seekers Trinidad and Tobago

Trinidad during the period November 12-19, 2022. The objectives for this visit were: to share ideas and tools with fishermen that promote turtle-friendly fishing methods that also support livelihoods derived from artisanal fishing practices; to provide sample fishing gear to interested fishermen to experiment with, with the aim of expanding training and testing activities during the next turtle season; and to connect with stakeholders from the government (especially Fisheries Division, and the Turtle Bycatch Working Group [TBWG] of the NSTTF), NGOs (Future Fishers, Nature Seekers), and the fishing sector to share project advances and continue strategizing next steps for the project.

- Discussions commenced regarding the installation of turtle-friendly beachfront lighting on nesting beaches in Trinidad and Tobago, primarily Grande Riviere.
- Cabinet approval received for the appointment of three hundred and ninety-seven (397) honorary game wardens, some of whom will assist with sea turtle conservation activities.



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CANADA

- Canada is currently undergoing work for the final year of the HSP (Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk) program, funded in part by Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Through this work, WWF-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. The documentary-short film is expected to be complete and premiered within the next few months.



- Line-cutters used for the disentanglement of leatherback sea turtles have been sent to Nova Scotia to be tested for effectiveness on their fisheries and have been proven to be successful. These tools have been recorded to save several leatherback sea turtles and other animals (i.e. harbour porpoise and sharks) from entanglement.
- New line-cutters are currently being fabricated and will be delivered to several fishers within Newfoundland and Nova Scotia.
- WWF-Canada is currently working to engage the Government of Canada, discuss their involvement with the IAC, and recommend a more active role in the IAC to better conserve and protect Canadian sea turtles. The IAC is an inter-governmental treaty which provides legal framework for countries in American continent to take action to benefit sea turtle species. 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.
- WWF-Canada marine conservation and fisheries specialist, Thiviya Kanagasabesan, spoke about leatherback sea turtles, entanglement and project work on CBC's The Broadcast: <https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-122/clip/15924435>



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COMMUNICATION MATERIALS

RAP DOCUMENTARY AND COMMUNICATION MATERIALS:

In order to visualize the development of the RAP and the need for execution of the RAP, a short documentary film has been produced with the cooperation of members of the working group. This documentary needs to inform a larger audience about the project and can also be used to support the fundraising activities. Shorts are made for social media in order to gain increased community engagement. The documentary was finalized in December and shared in three languages with the RAP Working Group in January. The videos were placed online and will be targeted through advertisement to a bigger audience. Please see the links:



[RAP Documentary ENG](#)



[RAP Documentary NL](#)



[RAP Documentary FR](#)

Besides this documentary, RAP brochures have been developed to use during informational sessions, for fundraising and for government endorsement. Lastly, every participating country will receive a RAP banner that has been designed in the same style as the brochures and needs to be used for the same purposes.

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

- August 2022 - February 2023:** Organizing and establishment of the RAP governing body with responsibilities and mandates;
- August 2022 - March 2023:** 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 (SPA) Protocol and IAC;
- January 2023 - April 2023:** Working with WWF-Offices on receiving national endorsement of the RAP.
- March 2023 - May 2023:** National workshops in the Guianas, Trinidad and Tobago for the adoption and implementation of the RAP;
- March 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.
- May 2023:** Organize the regional virtual RAP workshop

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

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