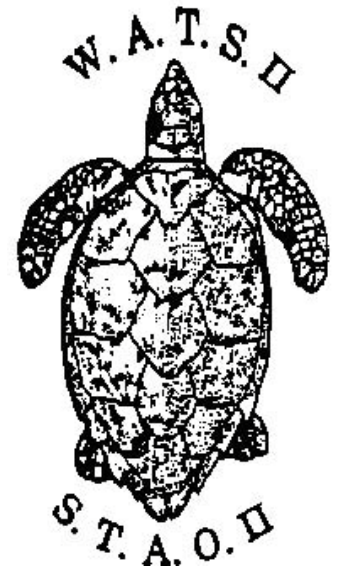


WATS II REPORT / DATA SET



National Report to WATS II for the Cayman Islands

Joe Parsons

12 October 1987

WATS2 069

With a grant from the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service, WIDECAST has digitized the databases and proceedings of the **Western Atlantic Turtle Symposium (WATS)** with the hope that the revitalized documents might provide a useful historical context for contemporary sea turtle management and conservation efforts in the Western Atlantic Region.

With the stated objective of serving “as a starting point for the identification of critical areas where it will be necessary to concentrate all efforts in the future”, the first Western Atlantic Turtle Symposium convened in Costa Rica (17-22 July 1983), and the second in Puerto Rico four years later (12-16 October 1987). WATS I featured National Reports from 43 political jurisdictions; 37 presented at WATS II.

WATS I opened with these words: “The talks which we started today have the multiple purpose of bringing our knowledge up to date about the biological peculiarities of the marine turtle populations of the western Atlantic; to know and analyse the scope of the National Reports prepared by the scientific and technical personnel of more than thirty nations of the region; to consider options for the orderly management of marine turtle populations; and in general to provide an adequate forum for the exchange of experiences among scientists, administrators, and individuals interested in making contributions for the preservation of this important natural resource.”

A quarter-century has passed, and the results of these historic meetings have been lost to science and to a new generation of managers and conservationists. Their unique importance in providing baseline data remains unrecognized, and their potential as a “starting point” is neither known nor appreciated.

The proceedings document what was known at the time concerning the status and distribution of nesting and foraging habitat, population sizes and trends, mortality factors, official statistics on exploitation and trade, estimated incidental catch, employment dependent on turtles, mariculture operations, public and private institutions concerned with conservation and use, legal aspects (e.g. regulations, enforcement, protected areas), and active research projects.

Despite the potential value of this information to agencies responsible for conducting stock assessments, monitoring recovery trends, safeguarding critical habitat, and evaluating conservation successes in the 21st century, the National Reports submitted to WATS II were not included in the published proceedings and, until now, have existed only in the private libraries of a handful of agencies and symposium participants. To help ensure the legacy of these symposia, we have digitized the entire proceedings – including National Reports, plenary presentations and panels, species synopses, and annotated bibliographies from both meetings – and posted them online at <http://www.widecast.org/What/RegionalPrograms.html>.

Each article has been scanned from the original document. Errors in the scan have been corrected; however, to be true to the original content (as closely as we can discern it), potential errors of content have not been corrected. This article can be cited (with the number of pages based on the layout of the original document) as:

Parsons, J. 1987. National Report to WATS II for the Cayman Islands. Prepared for the Second Western Atlantic Turtle Symposium (WATS II), 12-16 October 1987, Mayagüez, Puerto Rico. Doc. 069. 4 pages.

Karen L. Eckert
WIDECAST Executive Director
June 2009

W. A. T. S. II

Cayman Islands National Report by

Joe Parsons

A. SUMMARY OF PAST AND PRESENT STATUS OF TURTLES

From their day of discovery in 1503, the Cayman Islands have been, a name synonymous with turtle. These reptiles were the primary supply of fresh food for sea weary sailors, colonists and pirates alike, regardless of nationality. However as early as 1711, the danger of overfishing this valuable resource was probably recognized and a law was passed which stated that (1) 'no person shall destroy any turtle a-3g upon any Island or quays belonging to Jamaica'. Nevertheless, by 1800 vessels were fishing off the coast of Cuba and by the 1830's off the Mosquito Cays.

It seems that turtles were never plentiful in these Islands within recent history but residents were always able to catch a few to enrich their diet even to this day. Hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) and green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) are seen throughout the year and the loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*) are seen during the nesting season.

There is still much work to be done to determine the true status of the turtle population. Adults of all 3 species, mentioned above, are seen frequently during the nesting season although nesting is not plentiful and vary greatly from year to year.

B. NESTING

There has been little change in the nesting beaches since the 1983 Symposium except for the West Bay Beach where several more hotels and condominiums are being built. A loggerhead turtle nest has hatched on that beach this season, however. Nesting throughout Grand Cayman is predominantly by the loggerhead turtle but some green turtle also nest. Nesting occurs on all beaches on Grand Cayman and there has been some unconfirmed nesting on Cayman Brac and Little Cayman. A summary of the nests collected and hatched at Cayman Turtle Farm is given in Table 1.

C. FORAGING AREAS

All of the sounds and bays around Grand Cayman have turtle grass and are important foraging areas for the Green turtle. Hawksbill turtles are seen on all the reefs around the Islands. Not much is seen of the loggerhead except during the nesting season.

D. NATIONAL REGULATIONS

The Marine Conservation Law, Turtle Protection Regulations were amended in April 85 to prevent turtle fishing except by licenced individuals. It sets a closed season from May through October and prevents fishing by harpoon and speargun. It allows the Marine Conservation Board, which is the licencing authority, to set size and catch limits. The Board has set catch limits at six turtles per licence per season and minimum size limits of 321 k.9 for green turtle and 214 kg for hawksbill and loggerhead turtle. Higher penalties were also set for violations.

E. THE FISHERY

Since the strengthening of the turtles regulations in 85, the protection of turtles has improved significantly. By setting the size limit to adult sizes only and requiring licences, the opportunity

take has been reduced. Only 5 green turtle and 4 hawksbill turtle were reported for the 1985/86 season. However a further 19 turtles are estimated to have been taken. In 1986/87 season, 2 green turtle 6 loggerhead turtle and 2 hawksbill turtle were reported.

F. RESEARCH

Cayman Turtle Farm continues its research in all aspects of raising turtles in captivity and also on the wild population. Between 1980 and 86 over 14,000 turtles have been released in Cayman Waters. These releases are shown on Table 2. Tag and recapture studies around Grand Cayman indicate that these turtles are healthy and growing well. Many of them are seen around the Island but tag returns have been received from the Central American countries, Cuba and Jamaica.

1985 marked the first ever breeding attempts of the highly endangered Kemps Ridly (*Lepidochelys kemp*) in captivity. This year over 200 were hatched. 160 of these were given to the National Marine Fisheries Service Research Station at Galveston Texas.

REFERENCE

Roger Smith. Marine History of the Cayman Islands. Unpublished.

TABLE I. SUMMARY OF NESTING ON GRAND CAYMAN

Year	Species *	No. of Nests	No. of Eggs Collected	No. of Hatchlings Released
1983	Cc	17	1,774	973
1983	Cm	4	494	319
1984	Cc	1	84	2
1985	Cc	2	176	18
1985	Cm	2	258	0
1986	Cc	2	217	168

* Cc=*Caretta caretta*; Cm=*Chelonia mydas*; Dc=*Dermochelys coriacea*; Ei=*Eretmochelys imbricata*; Lk=*Lepidochelys kemp*i; Lo=*Lepidochelys olivacea*; Uk=Unknown

TABLE 2. RELEASE OF CAPTIVE-BRED SEA TURTLES INTO CAYMAN WATERS BY CAYMAN TURTLE FARM

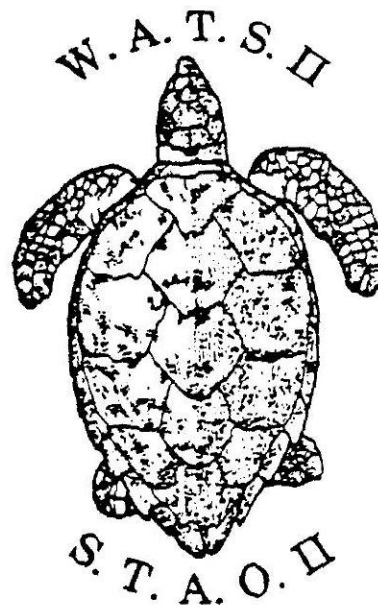
Date	# of Turtles	Age, Month
October 1980	1,074	13
November 1980-February 1981	134	16
January 1981	60	17
March 1981-September 1981	1,331	10
September 1981-November 1981	294	14
October 1981	55	1
November 1981-December 1981	24	2
January 1983	15	5
February 1983	1	31
June 1983	50	10
July 1983-August 1983	5	10
October 1983-December 1983	3,755	1 day
November 1983	650	1 day
June 1984	2	9
October 1984	215	12
October 1984	1,021	12
October 1984-November 1984	327	12
October 1984	435	12
February 1985	12	30
September 1985-November 1985	2,641	1 day
November 1985-December	466	1 day
November 1986	2	13
November 1986	193	15
November 1986	350	15
November 1986	400	15
November 1986	375	13
November 1986	561	13
November 1986	55	15
TOTAL	14,503	

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W . A . T . S . II

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By: Joe Parsons

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1984	C.C	1	84	2
1985	C.C.	2	176	18
1985	C.M.	2	258	0
1986	C.C.	2	217	168

TABLE 2.

Release of captive-bred sea turtles into Cayman waters by Cayman
Turtle Farm.

DATE	# OF TURTLES	AGE, MONTH
Oct 80	1074	13
Nov 80 - Feb 81	134	16
Jan 81	60	17
Mar 81 - Sept 81	1331	10
Sept 81 - Nov 81	294	14
Oct 81	55	1
Nov 81 - Dec 81	24	2
Jan 83	15	5
Feb 83	1	31
Jun 83	50	10
Jul 83 - Aug 83	5	10
Oct 83 - Dec 83	3755	1 day
Nov 83	650	1 day
Jun 84	2	9
Oct 84	215	12
Oct 84	1021	12
Oct 84 - Nov 84	327	12
Oct 84	435	12
Feb 85	12	30
Sept 85 - Nov 85	2641	1 day
Nov 85 - Dec	466	1 day
Nov 86	2	13
Nov 86	193	15
Nov 86	350	15
Nov 86	400	15
Nov 86	375	13
Nov 86	561	13
Nov 86	55	15
TOTAL	14503	