

THE BRAZILIAN SEA TURTLE PROGRAM

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Until 1979, few things were known about Brazilian sea turtles, and almost nothing was done to assure the preservation of these animals threatened by extinction.

Some foreign surveys had described, but not very precisely, the occurrence of nesting areas on our coast, and also had recorded turtles that had been tagged in other countries or oceanic islands, such as Surinam and Ascencion Island.

In 1980, the Marine Turtles Project (TAMAR) was created by Instituto Brasileiro de Desenvolvimento Florestal; and Fundacao Brasileira para a Conservacao de Naturesa, to evaluate the real situation of these animals in Brasil.

For years, a detailed survey was conducted, in which 8,000 Km of coastline were studied, and thousands of interviews and scientific observations were made by TAMAR employees.

The main problem that threatens the marine turtles is the killing of females on the beach and the poaching of eggs. On most Brazilian beaches, very few turtles that come up to nest succeed in their aim.

As a result of this survey, eight areas were selected and considered essential to marine turtle survival. Other beaches were recognized as being of secondary importance.

Considered essential:

- 1) Lencors Maranhenses, state of Maranhao;
- 2) Biological Reserve of Atol das Roces; state of Rio Grande do Norte;
- 3) Trindade Island; state of Espirito Santo;
- 4) Fernando de Noronha Archipelago;
- 5) Biological Reserve of Santa Isabel; state of Sergipe
- 6) Praia do Forte and Vicinity; state of Bahia
- 7) Praia de Santa Maria (Interlagos); state of Bahia
- 8) Biological reserve of Comboios, state of Bahia.

The number of turtles that used to nest in Brazil was higher than presently. On many beaches they are now non-existent, and on other beaches few turtles remain.

In the five last stations described above, almost 150 Km, successful reproduction is being reestablished.

For lack of funds and personnel, TAMAR chose to transfer the eggs to beach hatcheries

with the conditions as close as possible to the natural ones. Since 1986, because of more education and popular participation in the regions, the project decided to keep part of the nests (30%) in their original places. No human predation occurred.

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