

## **A New Initiative to Protect Green Turtles at an Important Foraging Ground in Ceará, Brazil**

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Projeto Tartaruga Marinha (TAMAR) is a national marine turtle conservation project sponsored by the Government of Brazil (Instituto Brasileiro de Meio Ambiente-IBAMA) and private companies and foundations through Fundação Pró-Tamar. The state of Ceará, located in the extreme northeastern region of Brazil, is a confirmed feeding ground for green sea turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) that nest on Ascension Island (Bowen et al., 1989), Suriname (Schulz, 1975), and perhaps other rookeries as yet unidentified.

This important area of Brazil has the highest accidental capture of adult green turtles (mostly males) by various forms of artisanal fishing nets. There are also occasional records of juvenile hawksbills (*Eretmochelys imbricata*). To obtain detailed information on the incidental take, we conducted a survey (May-November 1991) in Almofala, a fishing village 290 km north of Fortaleza, in order to (a) estimate the number of turtles caught each year, (b) learn the methods of fishing employed by local fishermen, and (c) devise a recovery plan to develop strategies to reduce the number of turtles drowning. From this survey we estimate that 600-700 green turtles are caught each month during the November-February fishing season.

With the support of The Frankfurt Zoological Society, TAMAR has now completed a research station in the state of Ceará and, as of November 1992, initiated field work year-around along Almofala's 12 km of beach. Eduardo Moreira Lima is the Station Manager in Almofala. TAMAR is managing a total of three stations in foraging areas with very good results, by developing educational programs within the local communities and trying to develop better techniques for use by fishermen to minimize the number of turtle deaths in all their life history stages. We are also tagging all the turtles released alive in these areas, with hopes of obtaining growth and movement data should they be recaptured.

Bowen, B. W., A. B. Meylan, and J. C. Avise. 1989. An odyssey of the green sea turtle: Ascension Island revisited. *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 86:573-576.

Schulz, J. P. 1975. Sea Turtles Nesting in Suriname. *Zool. Verh. (Leiden)* No. 143. The Netherlands.

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