

# Marine Turtle Newsletter

## First Record of Olive Ridley Nesting in the State of Ceará, Brazil

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On 15 April 2002, an olive ridley sea turtle (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) nested on Praia de Patos (Patos Beach), 2°59'S, 39°41'W, State of Ceará, northeastern Brazil. The original report came from a fisherman, who found the nest about 10 km east of the Projeto TAMAR station at Almofala, Ceará. Hatchlings emerged from the nest 48 days later on 2 June 2002. The nest was excavated on the following day. Fourteen unhatched eggs and 7 live hatchlings were found inside the nest, but the total number of empty egg shells was not recorded.

The live hatchlings were brought on the same day to the TAMAR station at Almofala, where they were maintained in a tank with saltwater. One of the hatchlings had a severe malformation and died one day later. Four of the remaining turtles were released to the sea on the afternoon of 27 July 2002, on the beach in front of the TAMAR station. Nearly 50 people, including local schoolchildren, fishermen and visitors, participated enthusiastically in the release. The other two hatchlings are being kept in TAMAR's Almofala tanks for environmental education purposes.

Patos Beach is located about 800 m from a small village, next to the mouth of the Aracati-mirim River, and has an open sea approach. The beach is quite deserted apart from fishermen, who say that sea turtle nesting occurs with some regularity on that beach, although there was a higher level of nesting there about 30 or 40 years ago (no precise numbers provided).

The fisherman who reported the nest to TAMAR said he was inspired by an earlier visit to the Almofala station during a release of hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) hatchlings, an event which made him feel delighted ("a most beautiful thing!", in his words). This can be regarded as a successful result of TAMAR's environmental education activities in the area (Lima 2001). However, much remains to be done: some nests are still poached or depredated on Patos Beach. In the state of Ceará, TAMAR is preparing a pamphlet on sea turtle nest protection, to be distributed to and discussed with local communities as a way of increasing their awareness. This pamphlet will also function as a tool for the training of local agents, who will act in the protection of nests and sea turtles in general.

The nest reported here is the first documentation of an olive ridley nest in the State of Ceará, and is the first nest of any sea turtle species monitored by TAMAR at Almofala. This station was established to protect sea turtles on their feeding grounds mainly green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*), although other species are also found there in relatively low numbers (Marcovaldi 1993). Hawksbill nestings have regularly been recorded on the coast of the State of Ceará, but in a region about 240 km to the east of Almofala (Lima 2002). The two nearest known regular olive ridley nesting sites are located in northeastern Brazil to the south (in the State of Sergipe and in the contiguous northern part of the State of Bahia, about 1500 km away), and in French Guiana to the north (about 1800 km away) (Fretey 1999).

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