

Marine Turtle Newsletter

Second TAMAR-Tagged Hawksbill Recaptured in Corisco Bay, West Africa

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We report here the second tag recovery demonstrating hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) trans-Atlantic migration between Fernando de Noronha (Brazil) and Corisco Bay (on the border between Equatorial Guinea and Gabon). In Brazil, a long-term mark-recapture study by Projeto TAMAR-IBAMA has targeted juvenile hawksbills found foraging and resting in aggregations in the waters of the Fernando de Noronha archipelago and Rocas Atoll. Adult hawksbills are not observed at these sites.

A hawksbill turtle bearing tag number BR19547 was captured off Corisco Island (Equatorial Guinea). This hawksbill was tagged in 1998 in Fernando de Noronha (S 3° 51' 37.98'', W 32° 24' 59.09'') when it was captured in a feeding habitat on 22 November 1998 (Sanches & Bellini 1999). At the time of capture, the turtle had a curved carapace length of 51 cm, a curved carapace width of 44 cm, and a weight of 13.8 kg. It was recaptured on 19 January 2005 by a Corisco fisherman near the islet of Leva (0° 52' 37.98''N, 9° 18' 23.07''E), having travelled a straight-line distance of approximately 4670 km. It was described as being "a large female" and still double-tagged, although only one tag was recovered by researchers. No biometric data or further details were available from this recapture. The recovered tag appeared intact and in good conditions.

The first record of a similar migratory link documented a hawksbill tagged by TAMAR in November 1994 and recaptured in 1999 also in Corisco Bay, but in Gabonese territorial waters (Bellini *et al.* 2000). To the authors' knowledge there is only one other record of cross-Atlantic hawksbill tag recovery: a turtle tagged by TAMAR in Atol das Rocas and recaptured in Senegal in 1990 (Marcovaldi & Filippini 1991).

Corisco Bay harbours important feeding and nesting habitats for four sea turtles species (*Chelonia mydas*, *E. imbricata*, *Dermochelys coriacea*, *Lepidochelys olivacea*), although it is

primarily a green turtle foraging ground. In addition, it is an area of high coral and sponge abundance and juvenile hawksbills are often found here. Since the initial tagging of the migratory hawksbill reported here took place while at a juvenile stage and in a foraging habitat, it is possible that the Corisco region is also a breeding area for hawksbills or located along a route for their reproductive migrations. However, this is still unconfirmed, as the recapture took place at sea and the size or reproductive status of the turtle could not be ascertained. Nevertheless, this recovery confirms that hawksbills can undertake long-range migrations (Bellini *et al.* 2000; Bowen *et al.* 2007). To our knowledge this migration is among the farthest ever recorded for the species.

The Benga tribe communities in Corisco Bay are dedicated turtle hunters, supplying local and urban demand from nearby Libreville (Gabon) and Bata (Equatorial Guinea). Continued exploitation places strong pressure on the local hawksbill population and represents a serious threat to its survival. Conservation efforts are underway throughout the Gulf of Guinea region to address artisanal capture of both greens and hawksbill turtles. These results further highlight the importance of international cooperation in conservation efforts.

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