

Project Update: October 2008

I have successfully carried out two aerial surveys on Lake Gatún and identified 12 manatees from the air, including one juvenile and one female with calf. This is the largest number of manatees ever spotted during aerial surveys in the lake. Interviews with local people indicate little if any hunting in the area.

The greatest threat appears to be collision with boats, and there have been 17 manatee deaths reported since 1995 to date. In addition, through a non-invasive sampling method of collecting faeces, genetic analysis of the Bocas del Toro manatee population has been carried out using mitochondrial DNA and will be used to compare to samples from Gatún manatees. This is the first time genetic information has been obtained from Panama, and also the first time using manatee faeces. Another aerial survey is planned, as well as additional genetic analysis in order to obtain more conclusive results.