

Project Update: July 2015

The 2015 nesting season has officially started; we have registered almost 100 nests in less than 1 month. Female sea turtles started nesting early, possibly due to climate changes, specifically the El Nino effect. The water and weather has been much warmer earlier this year than in the past decade.

We welcomed our first tourism group on 18th July 2015: three families from Canada and U.S. The ecotourism group is trying very hard to bring us more and more tourists to help generate conservation funding. The new biologists were trained to use the GPS provided by Rufford and have begun recording nest coordinates over the 25 km nesting area. From our past data, we created a map of nesting distribution which shows obvious density differences of an area impacted from coastal development of a desalination plant and golf course. This shows the progress we can make through visual evidence to provide recommendations for nesting area protection from unregulated coastal development.

Dylan, a university student and I visited an artisan fishermen camp 10th July 2015. The head fishermen, Don Santiago and his wife, Myra welcomed us and showed us their new tourism permit to take people patrolling for sea turtle nests, which they are protecting, and a potential macro algae project. This family has traditionally hunted sea turtles, but are now taking it upon themselves with our help to reduce bycatch and poaching by looking into new economic alternatives, such as algae aquaculture and tourism. These are aspects we plan to incorporate into the Model for Conservation Tourism by the end of this 5-year project.



Left: First tourism group of the 2015 season examining a sea turtle nest. Right: Evaluating quality of macroalgae (*Ulva* sp) as a potential economic alternative to fishing with gill nets that easily catch sea turtles for an artisan fishing cooperative.



Figure 1: Distribution of nests showing obvious lower density due to coastal development (golf course)