

Project Update: May 2020

Introduction:

The project successfully started in August 2019 and is making good progress. The first quarter focused on activities such as planning with the Ghana Wildlife Division and Ghana Turtle Conservation Project team about the goals of the project, consultation with the community chief and elders to solicit their support for the project, general announcements made in communities about the project, mobilization and preparation of field equipment, beach patrols and nest surveys and finally installation of data loggers.

Project Activities:

The following activities were conducted in the second quarter period of this project:

Beach Patrols and nesting surveys: A nightly beach patrol was continued until the end of February 2020 to monitor all sea turtle activities on the beach and to keep the poaching rate at an absolute minimum. Patrolling was done for a minimum of 8 hours starting from 20:00 to 04:00. This schedule allowed us to maximise turtle encounters as we covered the beach until almost sunrise. During night patrols we encountered tracks and turtles and performed tagging, measuring, counting of eggs and sometimes immediate nest relocation protocols.

Morning patrols were also conducted to monitor and record hatching activity and immediately release turtles from nest boxes when they climb to the surface, record any evidence of poaching or erosion and conduct nest excavations for nests with no hatching activity within the full 70-day incubation period or nests within 5 days of hatching activity to exhume the contents of the nests.

Installation and removal of temperature loggers: The last batch of loggers were installed in late January 2020 according to the given fieldwork plan. After the 30th day of placing the loggers in the nest, nest boxes were placed on the nests. After the nests hatched, 30 hatchlings each per nest were sampled at random, and carapace length, carapace width and mass of hatchlings were recorded. Photographs were taken of all randomly selected hatchlings to check for carapace and shell mutations for archival purposes.

Meanwhile, all loggers installed in October and November had been removed and data downloaded on the hatching of the nests. Nests that were being monitored were those with loggers for the early and late December 2019 period. All data loggers were removed after the nest hatched and data downloaded from the loggers.

Data Analysis: Analysis of the data downloaded from the loggers is already in progress. On completion, the results will then be used in the final report and prepared for publication.

Community Activity and Covid 19: In the wake of this global pandemic, the community has given immense support to sea turtle conservation. Community members, after the continuous education and announcements on the relevance of sea turtles and the project, have volunteered in various ways. During the lockdown, when movements were limited and all works put to stop, individuals who encountered

turtles would call team members and inform us and watch the turtle until it safely leaves the beach, observing the Covid-19 safety measures as well.

Next Steps:

The next phase of the project will involve education in schools right after schools resume as schools were closed down because of the global. Meanwhile, writing of reports from the results obtained so far is underway so publications can be produced in time.