REGIONAL TAGGING PROGRAMME ON SEA TURTLES: PROGRESS ON TAGGING EXERCISE IN SABAH, MALAYSIA

by
Paul Basintal
Assistant Director, Sabah Parks
Sabah, MALAYSIA

1. INTRODUCTION

Following the recommendations made during the First Workshop on Marine Turtle Research and Conservation held in January 1996, the Marine Fishery Resources Development and Management Department (MFRDMD) proposed two regional projects. One of them is the regional turtle tagging. Under this project, sea turtles will be externally tagged on both their front flippers using inconel tags. In October 1998, MFRDMD provided Sabah Parks some 1000 inconel tags with codes starting from MY(S) 0001 to MY(S)1000.

Tagging program was carried out at Selingaan Island, one of the three islands within the 1,740-hectare Turtle Islands Park.

2. PROGRESS ON TAGGING EXERCISE

2.1 Tagging Period and Tagging Method

These inconel tags were applied to landing or nesting sea turtles starting from 8th July 1999 through 4th September 1999. Sea turtles were double tagged, with each tag applied through the first large axillary scale on the trailing edge of both the front flippers.

2.2 Number of Turtle Tagged

A total of 494 green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) were tagged which amounted to 988 tags. Twelve tags were found spoiled and thus not utilized. One hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) was tagged with tags {MY(S)0513/0514} recovered from a dead green turtle.

2.3 Tags Return

A total of 217 turtles or 43.9 percent made their nesting returns after being tagged. Of the figure, 112 turtles or 22.6 percent returned one time, 69 turtles or 13.9 percent returned two times, and 23

turtles or 4.6 percent returned three times. A few numbers of turtle returned to nest more than three times. For instance, only 8 turtles or 1.6 percent repeated nesting four times, 4 turtles or 0.8 percent made five returns, and only one turtle returned six times. The return interval period ranges from 1 day {for a turtle with tags MY(S) 0771/0772} to 78 days {for a turtle with tags MY(S) 0003/0004}.

2.4 Tag Loss

A total of 43 tags were found missing from the tagged turtles upon their returns. Thirty-two tags were discovered missing from turtles making their first return, while eight tags and three tags were observed missing during their second and third return respectively.

2.5 Dead Turtle with Inconel Tags

A green turtle bearing tag numbers MY(S) 0105/0106 was reported dead at Baguan Island, Philippines on 30 September 1999. The said turtle, with a - 112.2cm CCL and 99.3cm CCW, was first tagged on 10 July 1999. This turtle made two returns to Gulisaan Island on 7th August and 12th September depositing 45 eggs and 35 eggs respectively.

Another green turtle with tag numbers MY(S) 0513/0514 was found dead at Selingaan Island on 28th September 1999. This turtle was first tagged on 10th August 1999 and made three nesting returns to the same island on 1st September, 12th September, and 26th September 1999.

3. SUBSEQUENT STEPS TAKEN BY SABAH PARKS

After the supply of tags from MFRDMD, SEAFDEC was exhausted, Sabah Parks placed an order to National Band and Tags Co., New Port, Kentucky, USA for 10,000 inconel tags - MY(S) 1001 through MY(S)10,000. The cost of the tags including handling and custom duties amounted to RM37,369.91 or US$9,834.00. With the delivery of this order, tagging exercise at the Turtle Islands Park is now continued using inconel tags as opposed to monel tags previously.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of this regional tagging program, to double tag sea turtles with inconel tags, no doubt would be able to provide accurate information on the reproductive biology and population trends and dynamics of sea turtles. With this information, it certainly helps turtle experts to formulate conservation measures and management programs for the perpetuity of these animals.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to record his sincere appreciation to MFRDMD, SEAFDEC for providing sponsorship to enable his attendance at this meeting.