

Conservation news

New conservation project for hawksbill turtles in Estero Padre Ramos Natural Reserve, Nicaragua

Although categorized as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List, new discoveries continue to raise hopes for the recovery of hawksbill marine turtles *Eretmochelys imbricata* in the eastern Pacific Ocean. In 2008 a region-wide workshop on the species led to the formation of the Eastern Pacific Hawksbill Initiative (ICAPO, from its Spanish acronym), an organization that aims to understand, protect and conserve hawksbill turtles in the region. ICAPO's strength comes from collaborative partnerships between local conservation organizations throughout the eastern Pacific.

Following leads generated at the workshop ICAPO staff visited the Estero Padre Ramos Natural Reserve in July 2009, on Nicaragua's north-west coast, which was rumoured to host nesting hawksbill turtles. The team met with local community leaders and representatives of Nicaragua's Ministry of the Environment (MARENA), and found a total of 11 hawksbill nests, all of which had been poached. Using information on the condition of the nests and anecdotal reports by local community leaders about annual hawksbill nesting density, the research team made a conservative estimate of 60–100 hawksbill nests per season in Estero Padre Ramos. Considering that only 400–500 hawksbills are thought to nest annually across the entire eastern Pacific (from Mexico to Peru), which consists of c. 15,000 km of coastline, these estimates would make Estero Padre Ramos one of the most important nesting sites for the species in the region.

A few months after the visit ICAPO joined forces with Flora & Fauna International (FFI) and secured funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), The William H. Donner Foundation and the National Geographic Society to initiate a conservation programme at Estero Padre Ramos. Through the leadership of members of a local fishing cooperative (Cooperativa Multi-Sectorial de Jiquilillo, los Zorros y Padre Ramos, COJIZOPA), the project officially began on 9 May 2010. On only the second day of monitoring the team encountered its first nest and several more have since been protected. As the season progresses and the peak of the nesting season nears, data on nesting levels at Estero Padre Ramos will continue to accumulate and allow the assessment of the regional importance of the site.

Inspired largely by the recent discoveries at Estero Padre Ramos the site has been chosen as the venue for the Second Workshop of the Hawksbill Turtle in the Eastern Pacific, in July 2010. This gathering will provide an important opportunity for stakeholders to discuss and design options

for conservation and recovery of the population, while highlighting the recent discoveries in Estero Padre Ramos. The meeting will conclude with the first-ever Eastern Pacific Hawksbill Festival, which will include local and national bands, educational games and conservation awards.

Hawksbill conservation efforts in Estero Padre Ramos hinge largely on local community member stewardship and the primary involvement of these stakeholders is a central focus of the project. ICAPO, FFI, COJIZOPA, NFWF and MARENA are working cohesively to assure the continued success of the project, whilst eagerly awaiting information on the number of nesting females from the first season of monitoring.

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Massive die-off of fish at Lake Naivasha, Kenya

Following heavy storms along the southern shore of Lake Naivasha on 15–16 February 2010 many thousands of fish were found the following morning floating on the surface of the water adjacent to several horticultural farms. The event triggered intensive media speculation about the cause, together with an outcry from local fishermen and residents. Laboratory tests have shown that the fish died of oxygen starvation but the true cause of the problem is as yet unclear.

Lake Naivasha, long regarded as the jewel in the crown of Rift Valley lakes, was formerly known for its crystal clear waters and rich biodiversity. It was arguably one of Kenya's most valuable ecosystems and freshwater resources but over the past 30 years has been subjected to sustained abuse as a result of uncontrolled and unplanned human activities, which have resulted in the degradation of the entire lake basin to such an extent that it may already be irreparably damaged.

A burgeoning horticulture industry centred around the lake has attracted migrant workers from all parts of the country, and as a result numerous unplanned townships have emerged to service the ever expanding farms that produce flowers and vegetables for export to the super-markets of Europe. A 10-fold population increase and poor land-use practices have led to massive surface run-off, bringing thousands of tons of silt, nutrients and solid waste into the lake. Pollution of the lake is caused by nutrients leaking from some commercial horticultural farms together with all of Naivasha town's raw sewage, which enters the lake daily. Meanwhile, the papyrus belt that for decades