

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recent surveys have shown that the small island of Poilão, located amongst the islands of the Bijagós archipelago, Guinea Bissau, hosts the largest green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) rookery on the west coast of Africa, and one of the largest in the Atlantic Ocean. Traditionally, Poilão has been regarded as a sacred site by the Bijagós people, and this has contributed to turtle conservation. However, an emerging threat is the rapid development of fisheries in this region. In order to support efforts towards the recently established MoU Concerning Conservation Measures for Marine Turtles of the Atlantic Coast of Africa under the CMS we set out to identify important foraging areas for green turtles from this rookery. We attached 10 satellite transmitters to nesting turtles in November 2001 and were then able to follow these individuals via satellite showing that turtles demonstrated a diversity of behaviours. The key findings were as follows:

Migration

Four females migrated from Poilão to the Park National du Banc D'Arguin, Mauritania, where they remained until the transmitter units failed. Data gathered gave insights into the migration paths and habitat utilisation in one of Africa's most important national parks.

Two individuals travelled to Senegalese waters where transmissions for one individual ceased. The other individual was tracked as it returned to waters of the Bijagós Archipelago, Guinea Bissau.

The last four individuals were recorded making shorter range movements before premature cessation of transmissions. Thus, we cannot be sure as to the final destination of these individuals.

The findings illustrate the clear need for international collaboration for the protection of marine turtles, with at least four nations (Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania and Senegal) clearly sharing responsibility for the Poilão nesting population. This highlights the importance of the CMS MoU Concerning Conservation Measures for Marine Turtles of the Atlantic Coast of Africa and other international agreements.

Inter-nesting Behaviour

Turtles usually lay multiple clutches in any given breeding season. For six turtles we were able to record their behaviour between nestings. This showed that although most turtles stayed very close to Poilão for the duration of nesting, at least one turtle moved extensively within the Archipelago during the internesting period.

Recommendations:

Regional:

1. Support should be given for additional studies which, through telemetry or molecular techniques, allow a fuller assessment of the location of additional important foraging areas for green turtles in West Africa.
2. Given the migratory nature of this species it is important that threats, especially direct and incidental catch in both artisanal and industrialised fisheries, be assessed throughout the region.
3. Research recommendations should feed into a regional management plan such as already been drafted (Anon 2002)

Site specific:

4. It is clear from these and other findings that the João Vieira and Poilão National Marine Park (Guinea Bissau) and the Park National du Banc D'Arguin (Mauritania) constitute two key elements of the range of the single largest green turtle nesting aggregation in West Africa. Further studies should be undertaken in the Park National du Banc D'Arguin and throughout the Bijagos Archipelago to gain a fuller appreciation of the ecology of all species of marine turtle residing in their waters.
5. Ongoing monitoring of marine turtles at Poilão should be undertaken to allow a fuller assessment of the current status and trend in population size especially since green turtle populations have been demonstrated as showing profound inter-annual variation in nesting numbers (Broderick *et al.* 2001).