

Endangered turtles' travels are monitored

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The University of Exeter has begun a major conservation effort to help protect endangered leatherback turtles that nest near Gabon, West Africa.

The project, led by the university's Brendan Godley, is focused on what is believed to be the animals' last global stronghold, as Pacific populations dwindle precariously.

It's hoped the project, to tag and track the animals, will uncover their migratory secrets and provide the basis for efforts to safeguard them, university officials said in a news release. After fitting them with satellite trackers, researchers use the internet to follow their journeys, which are among the longest in the animal kingdom.

"Pacific leatherbacks have been decimated by incidental capture at sea and overexploitation, so it's vital we protect the Atlantic population," Godley explained.

He said little is known about the geographical range of the leatherbacks' travels. "We think turtles from Gabon could be traveling as far afield as South America, Europe and even the Indian Ocean to feed on their jellyfish prey," Godley said.

"We are just beginning to understand the importance of the leatherbacks of West Africa as a global stronghold, but we need to know where they live to protect them," he added.

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