

Rare turtle spotted in the Rio Grande

March 5 2014, by Stuart Paterson



The team fixed a radio telemetry tag to the hicatee in order to track it over the coming months. Credit: Marty Alvarez

This Valentine's Day (14 February) a team of young Belizean conservationists came across the Critically Endangered Hicatee, otherwise known as the Central American river turtle (*Dermatemys mawii*). For many of the team, this was the first time that they had seen this rare turtle – and it was the first time that one had been encountered

in Rio Grande.

Having captured the turtle in a trammel net, the team set about fixing a radio telemetry tag to its carapace in order to track it over the coming months. "This is an important find and we expect to learn a lot of new information about the turtle's behaviour, home range and feeding grounds," said team leader Elmar Requena. "Having this information, we will be able to share the research results with communities, non-governmental organisations and government departments so that everyone can come together to protect the Hicatee in Belize."

During the capture of this first turtle, team member Mary Alvarez said, "I have not seen a Hicatee in my life and now I got a Hicatee for Valentine's Day!"

To complete this romantic tale, the [team](#) decide to name the tagged Hicatee "Huberta" and she will be paired with "Hubert the Hicatee" which is the mascot being used to raise awareness about the project in Belize.

Species fact: Hicatee is the only species in the family Dermatemydae. Spending almost its entire life in the water it is vulnerable to water pollution but its main threats are from habitat destruction and hunting. These freshwater [turtles](#) have a brown, grey or olive shell, females have an olive head and males have a bright yellow head. They survive in Belize, Honduras and Guatemala and have almost been hunted to extinction in Mexico.

Provided by Fauna & Flora International

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