

Leatherback turtle nesting season begins in Nicaragua

27 November 2014, by Sarah Rakowski



Patrol teams retrieve eggs from a leatherback nest for relocation to a secure hatchery. Credit: Heydi Salazar/FFI

With this year's first recorded leatherback nests in Nicaragua, conservationists are crossing their fingers for a good season.

With a palpable sense of elation, Fauna & Flora International's (FFI) turtle conservation team in Nicaragua reports that it has recorded the first leatherback turtle [nests](#) of the season – an important milestone amid grave concerns for this species.

FFI's work with leatherbacks focuses on two key nesting sites on the central Nicaraguan coast: Salamina and Veracruz de Acayo.

The nesting season this year began with two females laying a nest each at Salamina, followed by another female who nested twice at Veracruz. Sadly, poachers beat the team to the first Veracruz nest and raided it; however they got there in time to secure the second one, whose eggs have now been relocated to a secure site where they will be kept safe until they hatch.

Another two nests have since been recorded at Salamina, bringing the total for this beach up to four.

The poaching incident at Veracruz is particularly upsetting because this site has seen a significant and consistent decline in the number of nesting females in recent years, and there are real fears for the future of leatherbacks at this beach.

Leatherback turtles nest in cycles, with each female coming ashore to lay several clutches of eggs every four years. Based on past trends, [conservationists](#) are pinning their hopes on a bumper nesting season in Nicaragua this year.

As Alison Gunn, Programme Manager at FFI, explained: "Records from past nesting cycles lead us to expect a higher than average number of leatherback nests this year. If this fails to materialise then it is entirely possible that within the next three years we may start to see seasons with no nests at all."

On a brighter note, she added, "The good news is that this season's first recorded nests have come nice and early – it's a great start, so we're hopeful!"

Greater regional coordination needed

Although globally listed as Vulnerable, the decline of [leatherback turtles](#) in the eastern Pacific has been dramatic. The number of nesting females has collapsed from tens of thousands 30 years ago to fewer than a thousand today and this subpopulation is now listed as Critically Endangered.

The decline is due to a number of human impacts including accidental entanglement and drowning in fishing nets, destruction of key nesting beaches for coastal developments, and pollution. The consumption of turtle eggs in some countries (such as Nicaragua) is also putting severe pressure on these animals at a critical stage in their

reproductive cycle.

Despite significant success in reducing threats on nesting beaches and substantial efforts to reduce fishing net entanglement in turtle foraging areas, the current population trajectory continues to head toward regional extinction.

Reversing this decline will require people and organisations across the eastern Pacific nations to join forces and coordinate monitoring and protection efforts.

Provided by Fauna & Flora International

APA citation: Leatherback turtle nesting season begins in Nicaragua (2014, November 27) retrieved 13 November 2019 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-11-leatherback-turtle-season-nicaragua.html>

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