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Sightings Records of Hawksbills in a Marine Protected Area of Honduras

Marsha K. Wright

Linda Baeza

Christian Hayes
Cedarville University, christianthayes@cedarville.edu

Lidia A. Salinas

Stephen G. Dunbar

*Presenting Author: Stephen G. Dunbar, sdunbar@llu.edu
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Wright, Marsha, K.[1,4]
Baeza, Linda[1,2]
Hayes, Christian, T.[1,3]
Salinas, Lidia, A.[1,5]
Dunbar, Stephen G.[1,3,5,*]

[1]Protective Turtle Ecology Center for Training, Outreach, and Research, Inc. (ProTECTOR). Colton, CA 92324
[2]Department of Biological Sciences, Moorpark College, Moorpark, CA 93021
[3]Marine Research Group, Department of Earth and Biological Sciences, Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, CA 92350
[4]Department of Biological Sciences, Oakwood University, Huntsville, AL 35896
[5]Protective Turtle Ecology Center for Training, Outreach, and Research, Inc., Honduras (ProTECTOR-H), Tegucigalpa, Honduras

ABSTRACT

The Protective Turtle Ecology Center for Training, Outreach, and Research, Inc. (ProTECTOR) works to increase the conservation of, and research on sea turtles in the country of Honduras. Efforts were made this summer to record the sightings of sea turtles in Roatán, specifically in the area of West End and the Roatán Marine Park (RMP). We worked in tandem with 13 dive shops in West End from June 9 – August 8, 2014 to collect dive sightings data. We prepared turtle sighting record sheets that prompted observers to record their name, the dive site and depth of each turtle sighting, along with the specific species spotted, and whether the turtle was a juvenile or adult. We also gave divers training on how to differentiate between species and between adult and juvenile turtles. The data collection sheet provided representative artwork detailing differences in shell shape and color, as well as head scute patterns among the three species (hawksbills, loggerheads, and greens) likely to be sighted in the area. We collected sighting records from 5 dive shops on Mondays and Thursdays, 4 dives shops on Tuesdays and Fridays, and 2 dive shops once weekly, due to low diving frequency. Approximately 720 turtle sightings were recorded in the two months of data collection ranging from a maximum of 80 turtles observed at one site to minimum of 1 turtle observed at one site. The majority of turtle sightings were recorded at Overheat Reef, Bikini Bottom, and Half Moon Bay Wall with 80, 59, and 41 turtle sightings recorded, respectively, over the two month span in which we collected dive sightings from the shops. When compared to sighting records

of the previous year, ArcGIS mapping showed a significant increase in the number of dive sites with turtle sightings and a subsequent increase in sightings at the same dive sites. The amount of dive sites where turtles were spotted increased from 20 dive sites in the previous year to 51 dive sites in 2014. Taken together, the data suggests an increase in turtles present in the off shore areas of West End between 2013 and 2014.