



Feature

WIOMSA Scientific Symposium draws “Team IOSEA” together in Maputo

(14 November 2013)

Members of the extended IOSEA family took advantage of their attendance at the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association’s Scientific Symposium (Maputo, Mozambique, 28 Oct - 2 Nov 2013) to hold an informative gathering on marine turtle conservation issues. The full-day session was organised on 31 October under the umbrella of the IOSEA Western Indian Ocean - Marine Turtle Task Force, thanks to the efforts of Peter Richardson and Lindsey West (Chair and Vice-Chair, respectively). The event was reasonably well attended despite several other events taking place simultaneously. Task Force members or proxies from Comoros, France (Réunion), Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, and United Kingdom were present, and participants from Kenya, Mauritius and Madagascar were among others who provided valuable inputs.



In the morning session, which focused on WIO-MTTF business, IOSEA Coordinator Douglas Hykle gave an update on several IOSEA initiatives currently under preparation. He demonstrated a new International Flipper Tag Recovery Database, nearing completion, which will allow users to access, search and visualise tag recovery records through a state-of-the-art online application. He also introduced the IOSEA Network of Sites of Importance for Marine Turtles, currently under development, and explained how interested individuals, organisations and governments can collaborate to nominate sites for consideration at the next meeting of Signatory States (SS7). Since several months’ lead-time is needed to review the submissions, he recommended that proposals be submitted by this coming January. Finally, he expressed hope that funding can be secured to enable the SS7 meeting to be held in Bangkok in the first half of 2014, potentially towards the end of April.

A presentation by Linda Harris, a post-doc at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU), introduced the topic of spatial planning for migratory species, with particular reference to sites of ecological importance for turtles in the Western Indian Ocean. The presentation highlighted some of the benefits of using a more sophisticated Marxan analysis to complement expert opinion for decision-making purposes, particularly in relation to optimizing habitat selection for conservation. See also the [IOSEA Electronic Library](#) for the presentation on this topic by Nel et al., delivered to the WIOMSA Scientific Symposium.

The afternoon session, which was opened to the wider symposium audience, was organised as mini-workshop to explore the socio-economic impacts of marine turtle use and conservation in the Western Indian Ocean.

Ronel Nel, NMMU and former WIO-MTTF Chair, presented key findings from an Ecological Risk Assessment that was carried out under her leadership in 2012 and updated in 2013. See also the IOSEA [Profile of the Month](#) for August, for more information on this topic.

Serge Solo, from WWF-Madagascar, presented a case study from Madagascar which described the development of a methodology for collecting and analyzing data, with the aim of determining the social and economic impacts of certain conservation interventions. Although the methodology itself proved to be problematic, an astute analysis of its shortcomings revealed many important lessons which other initiatives could learn from, and hopefully not repeat, in the future.

Shawn Peabody described lessons learned from six years of community-based marine turtle research and conservation conducted by Blue Ventures in Madagascar. A monitoring programme which had been collecting data on take of turtles in coastal waters, with the active involvement of fishing communities, ended – probably not only by coincidence – when increased effort was placed on public advocacy in favour of turtle protection. Evidently, the blurring of lines between applied research and advocacy had the effect of changing the perceptions of a key stakeholder group and ultimately affected their continued involvement.

Peter Richardson (Marine Conservation Society) presented an innovative approach, known as Community Voice Method, which had been used effectively in the Turks and Caicos Islands to gain a better understanding of turtle utilization in that British territory in the Caribbean. This community-based consultative approach shows considerable promise and could be of practical benefit in other regions, including the IOSEA area.

Sarah Ater's presentation, titled "Knowing them; before telling them" made the point that a more effective paradigm for community-based approaches should begin with a genuine attempt to understand the behaviour of individuals/communities, as a prerequisite to working together to find mutually acceptable solutions to the issues at hand; as opposed to an approach routed in a misguided belief that undesirable behaviour can be changed simply by explaining why that behaviour is harmful and pointing to "better" alternatives.

The session concluded with a presentation of a paper being developed by the IOSEA Secretariat to address a need that was identified by both the IOSEA Signatory States and the WIO-MTTF – namely, a review of literature on socio-economic aspects of marine turtle conservation and use, with an emphasis on social science and, ideally, examples of best practice and lessons learned. The compilation aims to cover the whole of the IOSEA region, as far as possible, and will not be limited to case studies from the Western Indian Ocean. It is hoped that a draft can be finalised and circulated for review before the end of the year.

All in all, the special WIO-MTTF / socio-economic session and other discussions in the margins of the main WIOSMA symposium proved to be a valuable opportunity for exchanging information and keeping abreast of regional developments.

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