



Media Release

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Mexican, Japanese and U.S. Fishermen Celebrate Sea Turtle's Epic Journey and Commit to Conservation

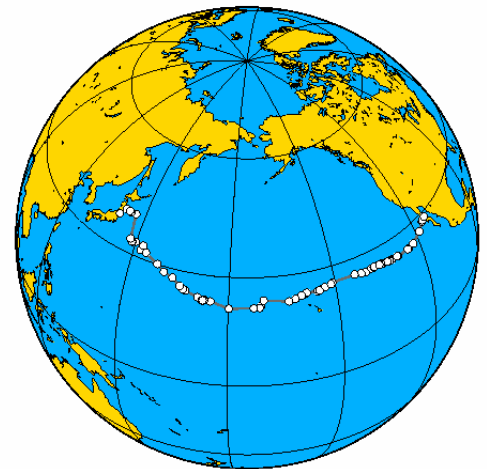
HONOLULU (7 December 2006) A group of 20 fishermen, researchers and resource managers from Mexico, Japan and the United States gathered in November to commemorate the 10th anniversary of Adelita's track from Baja California Sur to Japan—the first loggerhead sea turtle to provide physical proof of their trans-Pacific migration via satellite telemetry. The objective of the trip was to share experiences, raise awareness and work towards reducing bycatch of loggerhead sea turtles during a two-week expedition throughout the Japan Archipelago.

North Pacific loggerhead sea turtles nest exclusively on beaches in Japan and then migrate for decades spanning the entire North Pacific, passing Hawaii to the rich waters of Mexico. Listed as an endangered species by the World Conservation Union, loggerheads have declined dramatically to the point where there are no more than a few thousand females nesting in the North Pacific per year.

Much progress has been made since Adelita undertook her historic migration in 1996—in understanding the far-ranging ecosystem of this highly migratory species and of the impacts that threaten their survival—yet there is still much to accomplish.

Coastal fisheries bycatch in Mexican and Japanese waters plus international longline fisheries in the Central North Pacific have been identified as some of the leading sources of loggerhead sea turtle mortality. The Hawaii-based longline fishery has reduced its loggerhead interaction rates to negligible levels while maintaining profitability, and thus serves as an international model for the transfer of best-practice technologies and mitigation strategies.

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Adelita's 1996 track from Baja California Sur, Mexico to Japan (source: W.J. Nichols).

“Fishermen must take the initiative to solve sea turtle bycatch in their fisheries, before the government or someone steps in to do it for them—an alternative that no fishermen wants,” advised Leland Oldenburg, a member of the Hawaii Longline Association.

During the trip, the participants—experts in developing solutions to reduce unintentional capture of sea turtles during fishing operations—strengthened strategic alliances, built new partnerships in the plight to save the loggerhead turtle and achieved the following goals:

- Understanding some of the many challenges faced by foraging and nesting turtles in Japan;
- Sharing the problem of loggerhead sea turtle mortality in Baja California Sur with Japanese fishers, scientists and government representatives;
- Celebrating the success of the bycatch reduction efforts of the Hawaii-based longline fleet;
- Sharing the success of a loggerhead turtle refuge in Baja California Sur, a community-based conservation initiative which has empowered Mexican fishermen to reduce turtle bycatch while maintaining livelihoods;
- Comprehending the importance of bycatch in Baja California Sur relative to other locations and the impact of this phenomenon on the loggerhead turtle population;
- Brainstorming the problem and proposing possible solutions with Japanese and Hawaiian colleagues; and
- Generating follow-up strategies among the various partners who shared their experiences in Japan.

The group also presented at the Sea Turtle Association of Japan’s 17th Annual Sea Turtle Conference in Kumano in Mie Prefecture and partnered with local fishermen in Muroto, Shikoku Prefecture to learn Japanese fishing techniques and challenges. They were treated to traditional Japanese cultural events at the Moto Elementary School and led an environmental education workshop to encourage communication among schoolchildren in the United States, Mexico and Japan. The team also visited the Hiwasa Museum, founded by Professor K. Kondoh, one of the world’s first sea turtle conservationists, and paid an all important visit to the Japanese loggerhead nesting beaches.

A full report of the expedition will be finalized by mid December, and a documentary film is also being produced. For more information, contact Irene Kinan, Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, at Irene.Kinan@noaa.gov.

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Representatives of the Mexican Delegation

Jesús Lucero Romero, fisherman from Cabo San Lázaro, BCS, Mexico
Israel Ritchie Sánchez, fisherman from Puerto A. López Mateos, BCS, Mexico
Juan Ignacio Romero Aguilar, fisherman from San Juanico, BCS, Mexico
Johath Laudino-Santillán, Environmental Education Coordinator, Grupo Tortuguero
Raquel Briseño Dueñas, Coordinator for BITMAR, Instituto de Ciencias del Mar y Limnología, UNAM, Matzatlan, Mexico
Georgita Ruiz, Consultant, Grupo Tortuguero
Graciela Tiburcio Pintos. Coordinator for the Sea Turtle Protection Program of the H. IX Ayuntamiento de Los Cabos, B.C.S.

Representatives of the Japanese delegation

Akio Hashimoto, fisherman and partner of the Muroto Fisher's Cooperative, Japan
Shoji Yamashita, fisherman and partner of the Kumano Fisher's Cooperative, Japan
Akijiro Uta, Director of Production, Kumano Fisher's Cooperative, Japan
Kunio Horiuchi, fisherman and partner, Muroto Fisher's Cooperative, Japan
Dr. Yoshimasa Matsuzawa, Senior Researcher, Sea Turtle Association of Japan
Dr. Naoki Kamezaki, Professor, University of Toyko and Director, Sea Turtle Association of Japan;
Mizuno Kojiro, University of Tsukuba; Sea Turtle Association of Japan

Representatives of the United States delegation

Leland Oldenburg, fisherman and member of the Hawaii Longline Association
Diane Oldenburg, fisherman and member of the Hawai Longline Association
Hoyt Peckham, Expedition Director, University of California at Santa Cruz
Kama Dean, Co-Director, Pro Peninsula
Dr. Wallace J. Nichols, Senior Scientist, The Ocean Conservancy
Irene Kinan-Kelly, Turtle Coordinator, Western Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Council

This Expedition was made possible due to support by ProPeninsula, World Wildlife Fund, National Marine Fisheries Service, Duke project GLOBAL, and the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council.

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The delegation tagging and releasing loggerhead sea turtles incidentally captured in Japan's coastal pound net fishery thereby



The delegation presenting the Sea Turtle Association of Japan with a commemorative gift depicting the trans-Pacific migration of loggerheads from Japan, past Hawaii, to Baja California Sur.

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