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### **First Satellite Tracking of the "Most Endangered" Sea Turtle Population: New Project Captures Rare Hawksbill Turtles and Attaches Satellite Tracking Devices**

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A groundbreaking new project aims to rescue and research what may be the most endangered sea turtle population on the planet.

A team of biologists has successfully captured three critically endangered hawksbill turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) in the Gulf of California, northwest Mexico, and has applied the **first ever** satellite tags to individuals of this population.

The data, sent back to the biologists by satellite, will provide the first glimpses of the movements and habitat use of this enigmatic sea turtle and generate crucial information to help save them.

While hawksbills are considered critically endangered throughout the world, populations along the west coast of the Americas are particularly in trouble, going back to hunts more than 100 years ago for their shell which was made into jewelry and other crafts. Hawksbill turtles in this region have remained virtually unstudied until now.

The Eastern Pacific Hawksbill Initiative, known as Proyecto ¡CAREY! in Spanish, was started to evaluate the species and its potential for recovery in this part of the world.

In late 2007 Proyecto ¡CAREY! biologists drove 1,500 miles over two and a half months around the Gulf of California, visiting numerous fishing communities to gather information on the presence of hawksbill turtles and to raise awareness of their plight.

After identifying "hotspots" where hawksbills might still occur, the team returned in June 2008 to get a better look at the turtles in the ocean.

On June 20th 2008, during only their 6th night of research, the team successfully captured their first young hawksbill turtle, whose shell measured 48 cm in length.

Three days later two additional hawksbills were caught during the same night, these measuring 67.5 cm and 73.5 cm.

“We are extremely excited” comments Ingrid Yañez, one of the two biologists leading the project, “not only does this validate our efforts, but the implications for the future of hawksbills are very encouraging. Hawksbills may have a better chance than we thought”.

On hand for just such an occasion were two satellite transmitters, devices attached to the carapace of sea turtles and used to track their movements and habitat use.

“We had two satellite transmitters available for application during our monitoring, hoping we’d get lucky and find one or two turtles. We have already applied both!” exclaims Alexander Gaos, the other biologist on this husband, wife and son team. “This is a good sign for our future efforts to study and protect hawksbills.”

Senior scientists and project collaborators Jeffrey A. Seminoff (National Marine Fisheries Service) and Wallace J. Nichols (Ocean Conservancy and the California Academy of Sciences), have supported the project since its outset.

“Many people said it was too late for the Eastern Pacific hawksbill” states Nichols, “but they said the same thing about green turtles when we began studying them in the same area 15 years ago and the species has since made a strong comeback. Our goal is not to study sea turtle extinction, we plan to bring them back from the brink.”

Seminoff adds, “We are excited to see what kind of information the satellite tags produce and are busy securing additional tags for the remainder of the project.”

Upcoming endeavors of Proyecto CAREY! include additional monitoring and satellite telemetry within the Gulf of California region as well as participation in a region-wide workshop aimed at consolidating information and promoting investigation of hawksbills to be held in El Salvador in mid-July 2008 and attended by representatives from countries throughout the Americas.

Proyecto ¡CAREY! is a collaboration between San Diego-based Pro Peninsula and Mexico’s Grupo Tortuguero, with support from Ocean Conservancy, National Marine Fisheries Service, People’s Trust for Endangered Species, Oceana, Conservation International and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

To see photos and video of the recently tagged hawksbills and Proyecto ¡CAREY! researchers in action, visit: <http://drop.io/proyectocarey>

*Pro Peninsula is a San Diego based nonprofit organization that works to strengthen individual and community efforts to protect the natural environment throughout San Diego and the Baja California Peninsula. Visit [www.propeninsula.org](http://www.propeninsula.org)*