

## **UPDATE JULY - SEPTEMBER 2013**

### **LOCAL OCEAN TRUST: WATAMU TURTLE WATCH**

*Encouraging YOU to 'love your local ocean!'*

#### **Nesting Programme**

The Watamu Sea Turtle Programme is delighted to announce that the nesting sea turtles have broken the record this year with a total amount of 52 nests laid so far on Watamu Marine Park beach. This is great news for the Nest Monitoring & Protection programme and the Watamu area.

There have been 13 nesting females this quarter of which one laid 7 nests, and there have been 3 new females sighted and tagged. A total of 41 nests have hatched in 2013 so far and as we approach the end of the season we anticipate having yet more new nesting females. 26 of these nests hatched in this quarter with over 2400 hatchlings making it safely to the ocean. This brings the total hatchlings in 2013 to 4920. On a gloomier note we are looking into information that at least two of our nesting females may have been slaughtered



#### **By-Catch Net Release Programme**

Fishing in the creek and in the ocean are major commercial activities in Watamu but the fishing gear used is of serious threat to the sea turtles. The net release programme offers a chance of survival for the turtles which are entangled in nets or caught on hooks. The data collected through this



programme is vital for studying the trends of the turtles in Watamu and Mida Creek, with the data being filtered to study growth rate and population density for instance.

In total 246 releases were conducted through the By-Catch Net Release programme in the last three months – 99 Endangered Green turtles, 145 Critically Endangered Hawksbill, 1 Endangered Loggerhead and 1 Vulnerable Olive Ridley. The total number of releases since 1998 is 9951, so we're getting close to our 10,000th sea turtle release.

#### **Rehabilitation Centre**

Spear gun injuries, fibropapillomatosis, broken or jagged flippers, fishing hook wounds, infestation of goose barnacles, algae and emaciation are just some of the symptoms the rehab clinic has had to contend with this quarter. Of the 17 patients, 11 were successfully treated and released but 6 unfortunately died.

The Watamu Sea Turtle Programme team left for an anti-poaching survey and they returned with Bahati, a female green turtle. The team had startled a number of poachers who were about to kill the large green female turtle and she had a spear gun injury in her neck and another through her



flipper. A second poaching incident was Tumaini, a male green brought in with a serious head injury that had already started to heal (fragmented skull and crushed nasal cavity). Both turtles were successfully rehabilitated and released.

Our vet is always on standby to provide service and the turtle clinic advances every day in research related to drugs and equipment to enable us to take better care for the sick and injured patients. The total number of patients treated to date is 253.

### **Education**

15 Schools, 414 Students and 25 WCK Patrons have aided the 1674 students in 2013 so far who have visited the programme site. Each school brings an average of 25 students every term in locally hired transport facilitated by the education programme. Due to the popularity of the visit, WCK patrons have alerted us that more students would like to visit and we feel that the role we are playing in teaching our local children about our marine environment is an investment for the future.

The children are learning about their marine environment, sea turtles, whale sharks, dugongs, hazards of marine debris and mangroves. It is amazing to see the children share what they know and leave knowing that they can talk about marine topics from an informed point of view. For the schools who we cannot afford to bring to the project, Ann (our Education coordinator) conducts presentations and discussions at the schools.



For our young Marine Scouts, education has involved rock pooling, snorkelling, species identification and planting mangroves – they have so far planted 235 seedlings. These activities are aimed at improving their scientific and research skills. Some of the species they have recently identified are octopi, sea urchins, sea cucumbers, puffer fish and tube fish.



### **Community Outreach**

The Watamu Sea Turtle Programme continues to build a strong network between Beach Management Units. Currently we are doing rotational visits, sharing information and ideas, which has also prompted BMUs that are losing focus to arrange regular meetings. We are also assisting them in uniting together to fight the continuing ring netting problems. Our liaison officer in Watamu is also assisting with ring net campaigns and is a member of the Watamu fishing community, which is petitioning to the Fisheries Department **NOT** to allow ring netters.

Further, the fourth first aid refresher course designed by our very own Sammy Safari was held in Uyombo and the topics covered included qualities of a first aider, content/use of first aid kit, broken limbs and jigger treatment using Sammy's natural homemade remedy.

We are also working with 19 community groups right now. Many of our groups are involved with alternative income-generating activities to ease the pressure on the marine environment, and the following are some of the activities we are encouraging:

- cassava growing
- beekeeping
- indigenous tree nurseries
- selling gravel for building and construction
- soap making
- mangrove restoration

The Watamu Sea Turtle Programme continues to make regular visits and provide advice and assistance towards their activities.



Lastly, our fishing community is providing us with marine sightings which will provide data for our sea turtles, whale sharks and dugong campaign database.