

March 1, 2006



# Huon Coast Leatherback Turtle Conservation Project

There maybe only 200 leatherback turtles left nesting in PNG . . . .

Every turtle counts . . . .

Every nest counts . . . .

Every egg counts . . . .

Every hatchling counts . . . .

Their future is in 'our' hands . . . .



## The HCLTCP expands . . . .

This is now the third newsletter and the nesting and monitoring season continues. Due to increasing interest in the HCLTCP. Two new communities have been incorporated in the recovery efforts of leatherback turtles in the Western Pacific.

Communities that are now participating are Labu Tale, Busama, Salus (see inside), Lababia, Paiawa, Sapa and Kobo.

As well as more community involvement, the HCLTCP also facilitated four students from the University of Papua New Guinea on work experience. The experiences that Sam, Gideon, Charlie and Freddie have had will go towards their completion of their degrees, which in turn will build capacity for PNG. Sam and Gideon made friends at Salus and assisted with a beach profiling survey of the beaches from Labu Tale to Busama, whilst Charlie and Freddie were supported by WWF and conducted a market study. The HCLTCP also hosted Andre, a Master's student from Germany. Andre spent most of his time at Buli conducting a hatchling success study.

The aerial survey was also a successful activity.

The HCLTCP continues to gain greater support, we are making a difference

**ITAMBU**

Amant long Peta Flora na. Fauna Act  
igat to Buljatin Itabak Torosel.

Disapda to ita ye itap thin (K 500) na katabus sapoc:

1. Fa kilim itabak torosel
2. Baim na salu itabak torosel mit o hwa biligim en

**NOKEN KILIM NA  
KAIKAIM TROSEL  
NA KIAU BLO EM**

- Important Events**
- January-April - nest protection and hatchling study
  - Field season ends April



## Salus Village joins the HCLTCP

Salus Village joined the HCLTCP in mid-December 2006. The community is very happy to become part of the network of communities along the Huon Coast that are involved in the conservation, monitoring and recovery of leatherback turtles.

Sam and Gideon, from the UPNG spent several days at Salus conducting a household survey, raising awareness and assisting in the initial monitoring efforts.

To help kick-start monitoring efforts Levi Ambio, the field coordinator for the HCLTCP also spent several days providing training and advice to the newly appointed Salus Team Leaders and Beach Rangers.

To assist the Salus community in appreciating the plight of leatherback turtles in the Western Pacific, an education and awareness meeting was conducted by Jeff. This meeting was very well attended, with newsletters, pamphlets and comics from the Coastal Fisheries Management and Development Program distributed.



## Salus Village Community Incentive

After years of long walks of up to 3 hours for children from Salus to either attend school at Lababia or Buansing, the HCLTCP has under its community incentive scheme provided monetary assistance to the Salus community to purchase nails to begin construction of a new school building. The Salus community has been proactive in their desire for a school for their children, having cleared an area and cut timber for the school. Once construction is completed, the Salus community plans to lobby the Morobe Provincial Education Division for a teacher.

## Aerial Survey

During the second week of January, the HCLTCP hosted Scott Benson from US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and Vagi and Robert from Department of Environment and Conservation. These aerial surveys are sponsored by NOAA.

Scott and Vagi are both well known in HCLTCP communities and had come once again to conduct the annual aerial survey of nesting beaches along the Huon Coast. They also surveyed other beaches in the Oro Province, the New Guinea Islands and Bougainville.

In the past these aerial surveys have shown that the greatest density of nests in PNG has been on the beaches of the Huon Coast.

This year NOAA will also survey leatherback turtle nesting beaches in the Solomon Islands and West Papua, Indonesia.

Scott Benson had this to say about nesting numbers after the aerial survey was finished:

“Nesting is down throughout the region this year, and this can be normal. Next year will be the critical one. Will the decline continue, or will the leatherbacks rebound?”

Lets hope that our efforts show increased numbers next year.





## HCLTCP Documentary Filming

During January, the Huon Coast also received a visit from our friends, Scubazoo, who came to make a 30 minute educational video, and a 10 minute promotional video.

The 30 minute educational video will be used to raise awareness and as a training tool for team leaders and field monitors. The 10 minute promotional video will be used in overseas forums to highlight the good work of the communities involved in the HCLTCP, and to garner further funding support for the HCLTCP.

Simon Enderby, the cameraman with Scubazoo had this to say about the documentary making process:

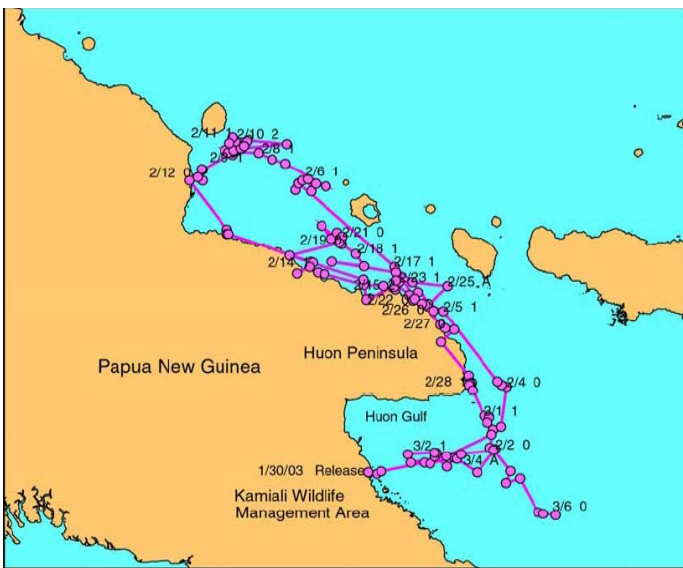
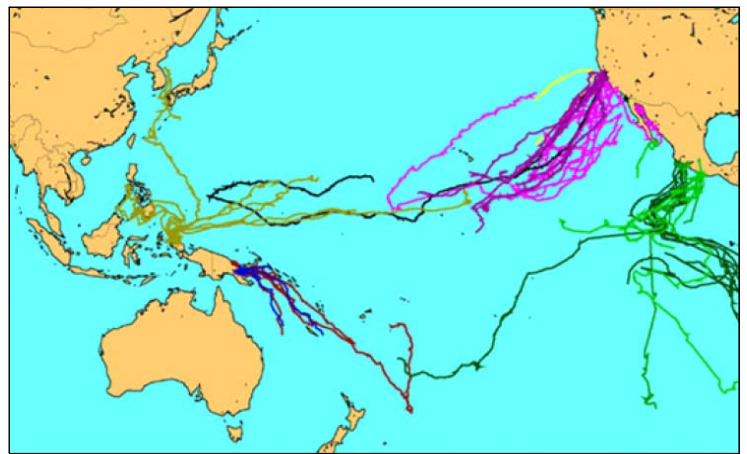
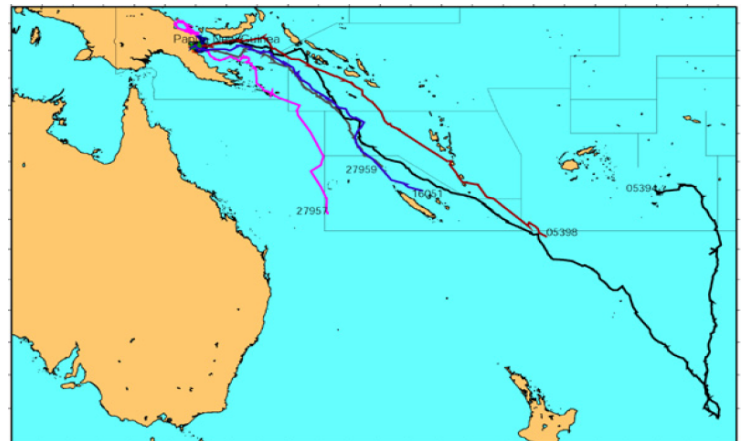
“Filming something like this is not only about recording what an animal does, but also about human emotions. About what people care about, and why”.



## Where do our Leatherback Turtles Go?

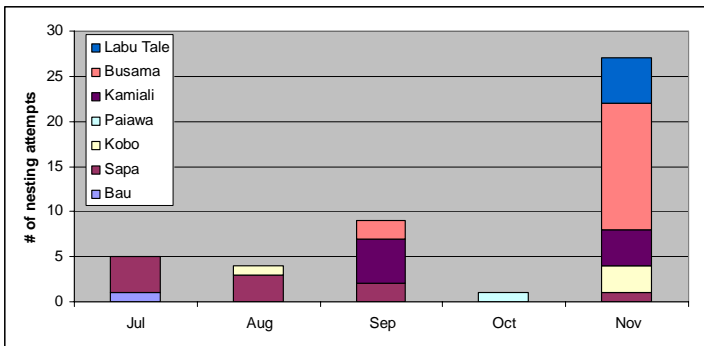
The maps below show the movements of leatherback turtles that were satellite tagged in 2001-2002 in an around the Huon Coast, and how after nesting had finished they headed down to Vanuatu and New Caledonia and then into the open ocean of the South Pacific.

Leatherback turtles that were satellite tagged during the jellyfish feeding season off the Californian coast in the United States of America are thought to be the same turtles that nest on the beaches of the Huon Coast.



## Nesting Trends

Rough weather with lots of large swells, and significant erosion at Kamiali, Busama and Labu tale in particular, prevented any nesting during October. Since then the season has picked up, and nests are now being reported at all sites each week (see below figure). In October the only activity was a nest emergence on the 14th of October at Kobo, from a nest laid on the 11th of August. Kamiali had 5 nests laid prior to 1st October but all were washed out. Busama also had 2 nests laid prior to 1st October. The first nest for the monitoring period was on Thursday night (26th October) at Paiawa.



## Leatherback Killed

A leatherback turtle was killed at Busama on 5th December by a group of inland people from the Markham Valley, who encountered it while walking down the coast to see their children at Salamaua High school.

The death occurred early in the evening before the patrol groups were on the beach. The patrol encountered the people responsible and were angered by the killing. The people responsible were taken to Busama and the community is now seeking compensation and prosecution.

This killing created quite a bit of concern in the national newspapers with many citizens of PNG calling for greater care of leatherback turtles.

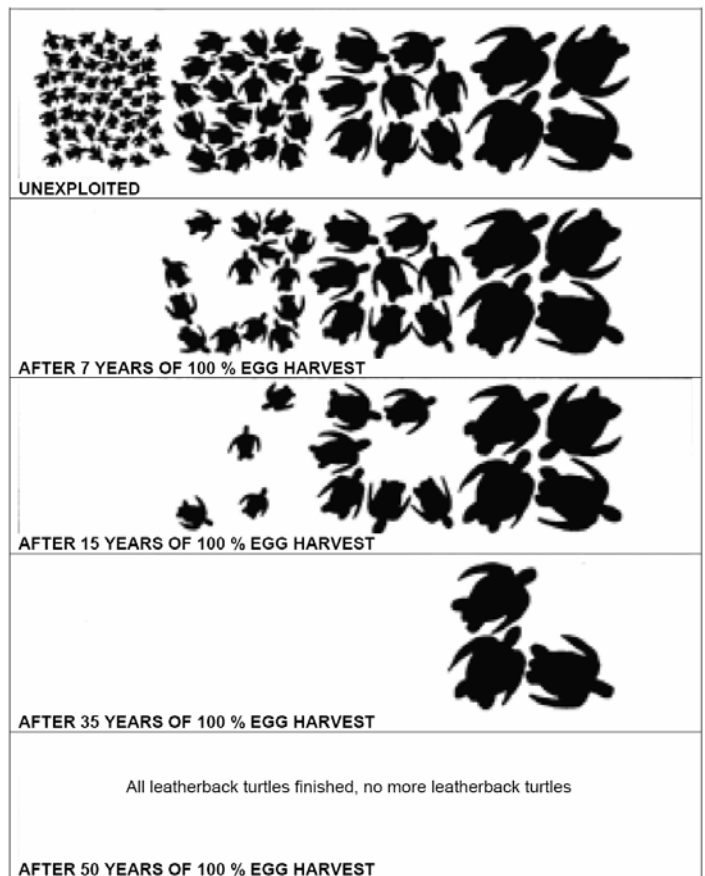
## How many eggs can a Leatherback Turtle lay in a life-time?

A female leatherback turtle nesting on the Huon Coast can expect to lay around 95 eggs each time she nests. In one season she will nest on average, three times. This means she will lay approximately 285 eggs in one season. From tagging studies, a leatherback turtle is expected to return to nest at least every third year. So how many eggs will a female leatherback turtle lay in her life-time? From studies conducted by scientists, a female leatherback turtle may nest for up to twenty years. This means she will nest possibly seven times and lay approximately 1,995 eggs in her life-time.



## Declines in Nesting Numbers

Because of the numerous threats leatherback turtles in the Western Pacific Ocean are facing extinction, with fewer turtles coming to nest on the beaches of the Huon Coast. One reason for this is the previous consumption and/or selling of leatherback turtle eggs (direct harvest). It is not until many years later, even decades, that the impacts of this direct harvesting is noticeable by less and less turtles arriving to nest. For every year that eggs are/were taken from the beach, less hatchlings make it to the sea, meaning less adults coming back to nest. If this continues, eventually, there will be no turtles as the remaining turtles die off with no replacements coming through.



## Always Remember the Grids

For the HCLTCP to be successful, we need to ensure all hatchlings are entering the sea, this is the only way we will have adult females returning to lay eggs in future years.

