

REVIEWS

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BIOLOGY AND STATUS OF THE HAWKSBILL IN THE CARIBBEAN

A REVIEW PREPARED BY THE
IUCN/SSC MARINE TURTLE SPECIALIST GROUP

Foreword

MARIA ANGELA (NECA) MARCOVALDI¹

¹*Past-Chairman, IUCN/SSC Marine Turtle Specialist Group,
Fundação Pró-TAMAR, Caixa Postal 2219, Salvador, Bahia, 40210-970, Brazil
[Fax: 55-71-876-1067; E-mail: protamar@e-net.com.br]*

Of all the sea turtle species in the world, the hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) has been the center of attention due primarily to its high demand for economic purposes. The wider Caribbean, an area that has been known as one of the most significant regions for this species, has been the focus in this discussion. For an appropriate management of a regional resource, such as the hawksbill in the Caribbean, a common understanding of available information is an essential first step.

We have known, in some aspects more than others, of the hawksbill's complex life cycle, of its economic demand and the history of its utilization, and of the many ways that have been employed to protect and manage the species. The results of the numerous research efforts that have been undertaken on a variety of aspects governing this species are both intriguing and startling.

During the last few years, a number of questions have been raised about the status of the hawksbill in the Caribbean, the role of the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and the Conservation of Sea Turtles in hawksbill conservation, and the proposal submitted by Cuba to CITES in 1997 to downlist their population of hawksbill sea turtles for purposes of trade.

As a contribution to these questions, the IUCN/SSC Marine Turtle Specialist Group (MTSG) decided to compile and distribute the available information on the hawksbill in the Caribbean. As chairman of the MTSG, I invited Anne Meylan to lead the production of a comprehensive regional document, due to her recognized expertise on this subject. Seven authors wrote chapters in the report; many colleagues pro-

vided necessary information to the authors, and each paper was reviewed by fellow colleagues and others who provided specific comments that were taken into consideration. This collection of papers was made possible through the assistance of many who volunteered their information, their experience, and their efforts. On behalf of the MTSG, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all the authors, all those who provided information, all reviewers, and all who provided specific comments.

The subsequent document, entitled *Biology and Status of the Hawksbill in the Caribbean*, was initially produced as a draft report by the MTSG and presented at the CITES meetings in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1997. As a next step it was decided that the scientific articles in this document should be published as a series of papers in a peer-reviewed journal. Most of the major chapters in the draft document have now gone through that process. The resulting collection of papers published in the following pages as a review of the hawksbill in the Caribbean will continue to be referred to as the above mentioned document from the MTSG.

I would also like to extend my thanks to Anders Rhodin and the editors of the journal *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* for providing additional independent peer-review of the articles in this document, and for editing and publishing it.

I hope that these papers give us some common understandings and can inspire further collaboration and cooperation locally, regionally, and internationally, to ensure creative and effective management and conservation programs, hence the continued existence of the hawksbill in the Caribbean.