

FIJI has been identified as an important foraging ground for turtles in the South Pacific.

The revelation was made at a workshop on satellite tagging of turtles in Nadi yesterday.

Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Program marine species officer Lui Bell said the finding was based on the results of a flipper and satellite tagging.

Government representatives from Kiribati, Tuvalu, Tonga, Vanuatu and Fiji gathered to discuss ways to build national capacities to enable the satellite tagging of turtles and learn more about their behaviours. The workshop was also supported by the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration and the Marine Conservation Action Fund.

Mr Bell said green turtle nesters mounted with satellite tags on Rose Island, American Samoa migrated to Fiji afterwards.

"Similarly, a hawksbill nester mounted with a satellite tag in Samoa, migrated to the EEZs of seven Pacific island countries and territories and ended up in the Fiji waters. Another green nester tagged in Cook Islands also found its way to Fiji waters," he said.

Monitoring has revealed dramatic declines in marine turtle populations over the last 20 years across much of South East Asia and the Pacific. Tagging has allowed scientists to understand better the feeding, nesting and migratory behaviours of these cultural icons.

WWF marine species co-ordinator Penina Solomon said with the turtle's traversing nature between wide oceans, regional co-operation ensured that establishing the management and protection of turtle population must go beyond the national level to the cross-border level.

"By working with communities, governments, scientists and other partners, WWF aims to save these ancient mariners for the benefit of future generations," he said.

"Strong partnerships are, and will continue to be essential to achieving shared goals," Ms Solomon said.

The workshop ends today.

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Picture: MARGARET WISE

A Turtle Satellite Tagging workshop participant, Kolinio Musudroka, releasing a tagged turtle.