


[ABOUT](#)
[SCHOOLS](#)
[BILLION BABY TURTLES](#)
[SEA TURTLE TRIPS](#)
[DONATE TO SAVE BABY TURTLES](#)

January 17, 2020

5 SEA TURTLE SUCCESS STORIES OF THE 2010'S

Colola Beach, Mexico, Black Turtle Capital of the World

After nearly twenty years of effort, the sea turtles nesting at Colola Beach on Mexico's Pacific coast, were nearly gone. From tens of thousands of nests in the 50's and 60's, their numbers dropped to just 533 in 1999. The black sea turtle (a sub-species of the green turtle, *Chelonia mydas agassizi*), can be found in the Pacific Ocean along the America's, and Colola is home to more than 80 percent of their nesting. Some researchers believed they were beyond help.

But a funny thing happened after the turn of the century. Children from the local indigenous Nahua community who were recruited by the University of Michoacan in the early years were growing up to be full-time research staff. People stopped eating turtles and their eggs and exporting them out of the community. Nesting numbers started rising. The twenty years of effort started to pay off as the hatchlings that were saved in the 80's began to return as adults. Throughout the decade, the number of nests rose to between 3,000 and 8,000 per year (160,000 – 560,000 hatchlings each season).

By 2010, a recovery was evident. Over the decade, nesting at the beach went from nearly 10,000 nests and 650,000 hatchlings in 2010, to more than 45,000 nests and 2 million hatchlings in 2019. That represents a more than 8,000% increase over 20 years, which makes Colola one of the world's most successful sea turtle conservation efforts. The community and university for these efforts won the Champions Award from the International Sea Turtle Society in 2018. Our Billion Baby Turtles program has supported this program with funding since 2013. (Photo above from Colola by Juan Ma Gonzalez).

Learn more:

- [Return of the Black Turtle](#)

- [Colola, Black Turtle Capital of the World Conservation Expedition](#)

Eastern Pacific Hawksbills

The Pacific coast of the America's for decades was a black hole for information on hawksbill sea turtles. Generally they live in coral reefs (this region does not have many reefs), few nesting beaches were known, and they were not frequently spotted, so many people believed there were too few in the region to invest the energy to protect them. But previously unknown (to the sea turtle community) nesting beaches in Nicaragua and El Salvador were found, and efforts to protect these beaches were launched in the late 2000's.

The Eastern Pacific Hawksbill Initiative (ICAPO), a network of researchers, non-profits, and local communities, was created to support research and conservation efforts from Mexico to Peru. Researchers discovered that hawksbills in this region live in mangroves, upending long-held beliefs about hawksbills. Now ten nesting beaches and fifteen foraging areas are being protected, representing more than 90 percent of known nesting for this population. There are now believed to be at least 1,000 adult hawksbills in the region. Two major beaches, one each in El Salvador and Nicaragua, are fully protected by conservation organizations ([ProCosta](#) in El Salvador and [Fauna & Flora International](#) in Nicaragua).



Photo: Eastern Pacific hawksbill from Padre Ramos, Nicaragua (Brad Nahill / SEE Turtles)

The efforts of this growing community of residents, researchers, and others are paying off. According to Michael Liles of ProCosta, "We have flipped the script of the fate of hawksbills in Jiquilisco Bay in El Salvador--the most important nesting site in the eastern Pacific--going from 0% of hawksbills nests protected in 2007 to over 95% protected in 2018." For these efforts, ICAPO received the Champions Award in 2016 from the International Sea Turtle Society. Our Billion Baby Turtles and conservation travel programs have supported these efforts since 2011.

Learn more:

- [Eastern Pacific Hawksbill Initiative](#)
- [ProCosta: Protecting El Salvador's Unique Hawksbill Turtles](#)
- [Costa Rica Green & Hawksbill Research Expedition](#)

SUPPORT THESE NESTING BEACHES THROUGH BILLION BABY TURTLES

Florida's Stunning Sea Turtle Comeback

Dozens of organizations and government agencies have been working on Florida's coast to protect sea turtles for decades. While the leatherback, loggerhead, and green turtles nesting on this state's beaches don't have the levels of pressure from people eating eggs and turtles as in many other places, they face a variety of challenges. Coastal development, including beach lighting, furniture, pollution, and coastal armoring, is evident throughout the state. Large numbers of tourists can impact nesting beaches, generate a lot of trash, and bring their boats and vehicles.

With these challenges and others, the recovery of the green and loggerhead nesting in Florida has been dramatic. 2019 was a banner year for the state's beaches, with more than 50,000 loggerhead nests and 40,000 green turtles nesting on index beaches that are tracked by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The 2019 green turtle totals were a record and loggerhead nesting set a record in 2016 with more than 60,000 nests. Compared to the 2000's, where green turtle peak nesting ranged from about 5,000 to 10,000 nests, the 2010's were an extraordinary decade, with four years each passing 25,000 nests. Loggerhead nesting, which had dipped to 30,000 to 40,000 nests per season in the 2000's after ranging from 40,000 – 60,000 in the previous decade, rebounded to similar numbers in the earlier decade.

Learn more:

- [Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission Sea Turtle Tracking](#)
- [Banner Year For Sea Turtle Nesting in Southwest Florida \(Herald Tribune, 2019\)](#)

Ending the Tortoiseshell Trade in Cartagena, Colombia

Cartagena, Colombia, is an extraordinary mixture of cultures with a fascinating history. From a Spanish colony founded in 1533, it has become a major tourist destination, home to the largest fortification in the Spanish colonies (San Felipe Castle) and a well-preserved historical area known as the "Walled City." More than 3 million travelers visited this city in 2018, making it one of the country's top destinations. Unfortunately for sea turtles, products made from hawksbill shells (aka tortoiseshell) has been a popular souvenir and the city has developed a reputation of being a hub for this illegal trade.

The tortoiseshell trade has devastated populations of hawksbill turtles around the world. An estimated 9 million shells were exported to Japan from 1844 to 1992, according to a recent study by Monterey Bay Aquarium. Hawksbills are now considered critically endangered with estimates of adult females worldwide ranging from 15,000 to 25,000. In Cartagena, research by Fundacion Tortugas del Mar, a Colombian conservation organization, showed that from 2008 to 2013, around twenty stores and vendors sold an average of 2,500 products per year. The city was identified as the second largest hotspot for this trade in the 2017 report [Endangered Souvenirs](#), published by our [Too Rare To Wear](#) campaign.



Tortoiseshell for sale in Cartagena (Fundacion Tortugas del Mar)

Fortunately for the hawksbills, the hard work of organizations led by Fundacion Tortugas del Mar, along with WWF Colombia and others, in partnership with city officials and law enforcement agencies have reduced the trade in the city by an estimated 80 percent. Frequent police patrols have reduced the number of tortoiseshell products found from an average of 2,000 per year to around 200 or fewer products the past two years, according to research by the Fundacion. This success comes from a combination of collaboration between conservation organizations and local authorities, outreach and education, and recruiting souvenir shops to be certified turtle-free by the Fundacion. Too Rare To Wear has worked with Fundacion Tortugas del Mar on this effort since 2016.

Learn more:

- [Fundacion Tortugas del Mar \(Facebook page\)](#)
- [Ending the Turtlesell Trade in Colombia](#)

Recovery of Hawksbills in the Atlantic and Caribbean

As mentioned above, the tortoiseshell trade has decimated hawksbill populations around the world, and the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico populations were among the hardest hit. According to data from the most recent hawksbill Red List assessment by the IUCN, approximately 660,000 shells were exported to Japan from 1950 to 1992 (though the recent research by Monterey Bay Aquarium shows that may be significantly underestimated). With this trade, nesting beaches from Mexico all the way to Colombia and throughout the Caribbean islands dropped dramatically.

The tide for hawksbills started to turn in the early 90's, when Japan finally ended its legal tortoiseshell trade for good through the CITES trade. This did not end this trade (see previous section) but did represent a turning point in efforts to protect this species. Now, nearly thirty years later, we are starting see the results as a generation of turtles that avoided the trade matures, though local challenges like hunting of hawksbills and illegal collection of eggs persist.

Two nesting beaches in the region are particular bright spots, one in Panama and one in Mexico and have grown dramatically due to the hard work of researchers and local communities to reduce illegal collection of eggs and adult turtles. In Panama, according to research carried out

by Annie and Peter Meylen in conjunction with the Sea Turtle Conservancy, nesting in the Zapatilla Cays area in the Bocas del Toro archipelago has grown nearly 500 percent since 2006, to more than 1,000 nests in 2018 and have surpassed 100,000 hatchlings produced the past two seasons.

On Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, two groups have been working to protect hawksbill since the early 90's, Pronatura Peninsula de Yucatan and Grupo Ecologista Quelonios. In the early 2010's, Quelonios averaged between 400 to 500 nests (45,000 to 55,000 hatchlings) but through the decade those numbers grew to more than 1,000 nests each year in 2017 and 2018 (more than 100,000 hatchlings per season). Pronatura has also seen a major increase in hawksbill nesting at several beaches, with Holbox surpassing 1,000 nests in a season for the first time and two other beaches showing significant growth (Celestun and El Cuyo). Our Billion Baby Turtles program has provided financial support for both of these projects, Sea Turtle Conservancy in 2019, Quelonios since 2018, and Pronatura since 2017.

Learn more:

- [Grupo Ecologista Quelonios \(Facebook\)](#)
- [Sea Turtle Conservancy Panama](#)
- [Pronatura Peninsula de Yucatan](#)

These success stories show that communities working with conservationists, researchers, and government agencies can significantly reduce threats that turtles face and bring endangered species back from the brink. Many threats to sea turtles persist and new ones are emerging, but with collective efforts, the recovery of sea turtles around the world can continue. A big thanks to everyone out there who contributed towards these success stories!



Newer Post

[Saving Baby Turtles Around The World](#)

Older Post

[Turtles, Turtles Everywhere](#)

[ADVENTURE TOURS](#)

[CONSERVATION SUCCESS](#)

[CONTACT US](#)

[PRIVACY POLICY](#)

SEE TURTLES, 7227 SW LINETTE WAY, BEAVERTON OR 97007 800-215-0378