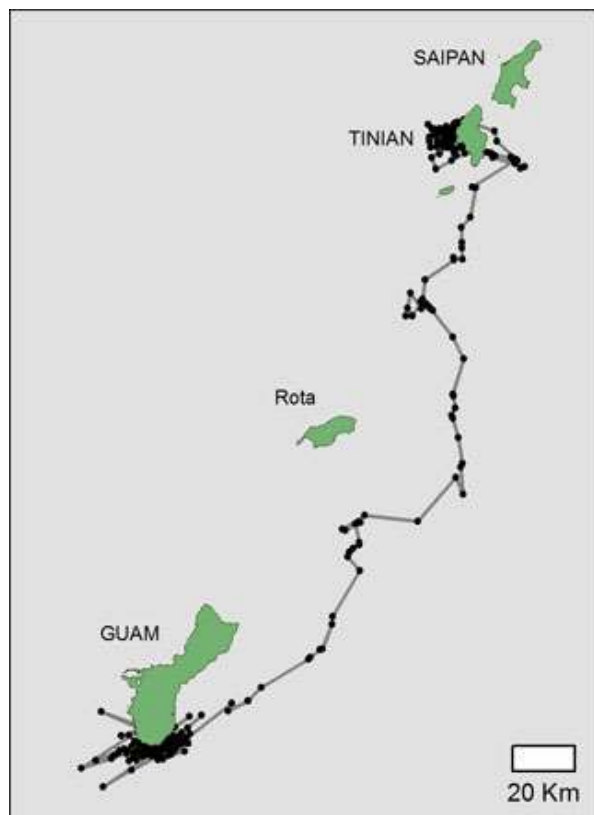


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Cooperative Turtle Research Advances in the Marianas and American Samoa



Satellite track of a subadult hawksbill turtle showing its locations during the period 20 August—31 December 2013. The turtle migrated from Tinian (in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands) to Guam. NOAA image by Kyle Van Houtan.

Sea turtle researchers in the PIFSC Marine Turtle Assessment (MTA) group have been actively engaged in studies of turtle populations across the NMFS Pacific Islands Region. Recently they formalized research partnerships with the U.S. Navy NAVFAC and PACFLEET groups to study the distribution of sea turtle populations in the Marianas Range Complex. The joint effort is aimed at understanding nearshore habitat use by sea turtles near strategic sites for the Navy, mostly in Guam, Tinian, and Saipan. As part of this study, PIFSC staff recently analyzed the first four months of biotelemetry data transmitted by 4 green turtles and 2 hawksbills to which the PIFSC scientists had attached tags with satellite transmitters. The data enabled the researchers to document areas of high habitat use by sea turtles near Saipan, Saipan and a migration of a subadult hawksbill turtle from Fleming Point, Tinian to near Cocos Lagoon, Guam.

In the eastern part of the Pacific Islands Region, MTA researchers have been engaged in studies of sea turtles in American Samoa. This work has been a collaborative effort involving PIFSC, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR), and other partners. For the past 2 years, scientists of PIFSC, USFWS and DMWR have monitored sea turtles in American Samoa. In September 2013, PIFSC researchers T. Todd Jones and Shawn Murakawa and DMWR staff performed necropsies on 24 turtles stranded on Tutuila. In October and November, PIFSC scientist Kyle Van Houtan worked with colleagues from DMWR, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the NOAA Pacific Islands Regional Office to respond to a wastewater leak in Pago Pago Harbor and the subsequent red tide event that caused 8 turtle strandings. In December, Van Houtan, Jones, and colleagues from USFWS, DMWR, and the National Park Service traveled to Rose Atoll to survey nesting green turtles and attach satellite tags to nesting females. The team documented 18—28 unique females over a three day period, estimating that 72—112 females nested at Rose

Atoll in the 2013 season and that from 216 to 336 females exist in this population. All estimates mentioned are preliminary and subject to revision, but are substantially higher than any previous estimates for Rose Atoll.



National Park Service and NOAA staff with a tagged green turtle at Rose Island, Manua, American Samoa. NOAA photo by Kyle Van Houtan.



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