

A Day In The Life Of Turtle Conservationists

■ The Todos Santos program released 9,000 hatchlings to sea last year, but they need your help

BY DESIRÉE BILON

The Todos Santos sea turtle conservation program is dedicated to saving two species of sea turtles, the Olive Ridley and the Leatherback, from their foremost

predators in the Baja peninsula— coyotes, birds, crabs and, especially, people. Both species are endangered. The Olive Ridleys,

despite being the most abundant turtle species in the world, is still in danger of extinction thanks to predators. And the threat is even more serious for the Leatherback species, which forage from Canada to the coast of Chile. Our area of the Baja peninsula is actually the farthest northern location that Pacific Leatherbacks nest. The first nest in the area was discovered this year in late January. Although Mexican law named sea turtles a pro-



Little baby turtles hustling out to sea for the first time. A moment of privacy here, please! (Photo by Brett Bilon)

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ected species in 1991, enforcement of the law is weak. An urban legend persists saying that eating the eggs is good for the libido, which partly accounts for why people snatch the eggs. Coyotes prefer the eggs too, but once the turtles hatch, birds and crabs prey on the babies. Dehydration from overexposure to the sun are constant threats.

Because of the turtles' endangered status, it's important not to drive on the beach. Turtles often climb into the tire tracks, become disoriented and get trapped; exposure to the sun eventually kills them. Driving can also crush baby turtles who are just surfacing from the nest. Those turtles that do make it to the water are preyed on by fish, but of course, that's simply nature's food chain.

A typical day in the life of the volunteers who released 9,000 hatchlings this past season goes something like this: during turtle nesting season, in the middle of the night, before dawn, biologist German Agundez is accompanied by a volunteer. The pair drives along the high tide line to search for turtle tracks, covering nearly 20 miles of beaches.

If the team notices tracks that traverse the quad runner's tracks at a parallel, they know a turtle has come up to the beach to nest.

When they locate the track, the team follows them to the nearest site to locate eggs. The site, called a cama in Spanish, is a circular area three to six feet in diameter in which the mother turtles hides her eggs. The team finds the nest by strategically poking a stick into the sand.

Each nest contains a whopping 80 to 130 eggs. This past season, the largest nest contained 151 eggs. In one evening, a team found a record nine nests with over 1,000 eggs between them.

The team's job, upon finding the nest, is to transport eggs to a safe corral where the nest depth is replicated by digging a whole elbow-deep into the sand. They record the species, continued on page 13



STATE NEWS...

continued from page 6

senator's party believes that Pemex may be able to raise capital by selling equity-like securities in certain subsidiaries to Mexican investors.

Mexico widens monopoly probe. Mexico's antitrust watchdog increased its probe into monopolistic practices by the telecommunications companies owned by gazzillionaire Carlos Slim.

The watchdog commission, Cofetel, said it's starting an investigation into interconnection services of fixed-line networks, which is a thinly-veiled reference to Slim's Telmex. Telmex operates about 90 percent of Mexico's 20 million fixed-line phones.

This is the seventh investigation into Slim's companies in three months. Six are investigating Telmex, and the seventh is investigating his cell phone company America Movil, which provides service to seven out of every 10 cellies in Mexico.

Slim was already found to be violating antitrust laws a few years ago, but he handily overturned that ruling in the courts. The probes come after Calderon promised to boost economic growth by improving competition in key sectors of the economy like telecommunications.

Slim purchased Telmex from the government in 1990. He was the richest man in the world with a net worth of \$59 billion until Warren Buffet took the top slot in recent months. Bill Gates comes in at a lowly third.

Foreign miners do Mexico. Mexico is seeing an influx of mining companies keen to prospect for new sources of precious metals.

A group of Canadian mining companies operating in the country are seeking ways to improve the regulatory processes in Mexico. Read: loosen it up and make it more hospitable to foreigners.

Vancouver-based Goldcorp Inc. is among the largest of the foreign companies here. It has three mines currently operating in the country and two development projects. The latter includes the \$1.5 billion Peñasquito project, which the company expects to produce 400,000 ounces of gold a year, along with silver, zinc, and lead. ♣

TURTLES...

continued from page 8

nest location, time, date, number of eggs, any other details about the find, and projected hatch date, which usually takes place 45 days later.

At seven in the morning volunteer Rita Herrera checks in on the corral to see if any of the turtles have made it onto the sand. Sticks are used to mark which nests have turtles that hatched and surfaced.


Later in the afternoon, trained volunteer Patricia Baum (and her youth group the "Future Biologists"), Eduardo Villalobos, Francesca Dvorak and German Agundez all return to the beach and search out the marking sticks. Volunteers clean the nests thoroughly. Live turtles remain in the cage. Dead and infertile eggs are sorted out and buried far from the corral.

Finally, just before sundown, the live turtles are released into the ocean. A high

tide line is drawn in the sand to remind people not to cross it; the baby turtles often get lodged in the footprints! Volunteers are invited to take a turtle and release it, and a turtle race ensues. People cheer as the waves carry them away, inspiring a feeling of hope in all those who come out to help.

Local filmmaker and educator Patricia Baum, who leads the "Future Biologists" group, presents lectures about the environ-

ment at elementary and middle schools in Todos Santos and Pescadero. Her students have made paintings and posters to promote the turtle conservation effort, and one fourth grade class wrote 25 individual letters to President Felipe Calderon informing him about the Leatherback project. Three months later, Calderon responded, commending the local schools' efforts. In his words, "Every egg needs to be given the opportunity to

continued on page 15


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*Based on 75 teams entered in the Tournament, 45 teams entered in the Daily Jackpots and 45 teams entered in the Optional Daily Gamefish Jackpot.

FOR MORE TOURNAMENT INFORMATION:
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Meetings are in Spanish.
English interpreter attending.



LAPAZ HOTEL...
continued from page 10

"Trattoria" menu, the Mexican "Los Agaves" and Argentinean "La Pampa" menu. The hotel's signature Argentinean woodfire grill is located under the palapa on the courtyard and serves Angus beef from the La Pampa menu nightly after 6 pm. The dinners are as affordable as the rooms, with most entrees running you from four to 20 dollars.

You can dine on the patio or inside. Watch out for the live entertainment on weekends; on Fridays and Saturdays, Latin American music is provided by Paco, starting at 7 pm.

The Hacienda is located in a quiet neighborhood three

short blocks from the Malecon and eight blocks north from the center of town. The off-street parking lot is securely lighted and large enough to accommodate all size vehicles for guests of the restaurant and hotel.

Hacienda Bugambillas can provide private facilities with catering for business meetings, weddings, birthdays and special occasions for up to 50 people. Additionally, they can accommodate groups of up to 200 people with custom buffet food service.

For more information, or to make a reservation for a room (or dinner), contact Hacienda staff at hotelgard@prodigy.net.mx or call 612-122-3088. ✍

QUE PASA?...
continued from page 12

American "Realtor" in Cabo). All the gang members were transferred to maximum security slammer on the mainland.

More animals maimed. The 13th annual, sometimes semi-annual, spay/neuter clinic was held in Todos Santos last week, staffed by U.S. and Mexican veterinarians. 110 animals were sterilized. The organizers were initially disappointed that this number was lower than in previous years, but the apparent reason for the lower numbers was at most of the homes the volunteers went to, the animals had already been sterilized.

After many years of promoting free clinics, and discounted surgeries, it appears that most pet owners finally got the message on responsible pet care.

The second piece of good news was the general condition of the animals who received surgeries. In the early years there were so many malnourished, mangy, and neglected cats and dogs, but this year an underweight animal was the

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exception, and there were very few cases of mange.

Home & garden tour cancelled. The Todos Santos Home & Garden tour scheduled for March 30 has been cancelled by the organizers, which is a devastating blow for the homeless critters of the area, as that was their biggest fund raiser. ✍

TURTLES...
continued from page 13

hatch and go out to sea."

Baum's "Future Biologists" program is a five day workshop, from which 12 students are selected for further training with ASUPMATOMA. These young future scientists help out with various projects,

work with turtles in the nurseries, pick up garbage, and help to collect data.

Although this was a very successful season, with over 9,000 hatchlings released to the ocean, the Todos Santos turtle conservation program still needs to raise \$10,000 by mid-July in order to begin the 2008-2009 season. The organization still needs an ATV, as well as additional support from the community.

Volunteers are needed for the following duties: fundraising, grant writing proposals, and patrolling. Anyone interested in helping can contact Patricia Baum at teampaty1@hotmail.com and donations can be made through www.lasirena.kayaksurf.com. ✍

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