In 2011 the Adopt A Reef Program was launched by ECOMAR with the goal of encouraging dive centers, marine guides, and coastal residents to adopt their favorite dive or snorkel sites and monitor that area of reef. Sites of all depths are needed to record changes on the reef over time. One of the primary components of this program, in addition to monitoring for healthy corals and keeping the reef clean of lionfish, is to monitor the reef area for sea turtles.

As we continue to gather data for the 2011 Sea Turtle Census, it is important to note the number of sea turtles that frequent the adopted reef site. In order to measure abundance, volunteers are asked to submit reports when a turtle is spotted. When a turtle is sighted in-water it is important to look for distinguishing characteristics to identify the species (See page 2), record your sighting and take pictures if possible!

In order to abide by Belize Fisheries laws, we remind all volunteers that observations should be made from a distance since it is illegal to harass sea turtles. This includes touching, chasing, attempting to hold, or feed them!

Contact Us about Adopting A Reef Today!
www.ecomarbelize.org/adopt_a_reef
Final Update on Olive

A mere 13 days after she was released, satellite signals from Olive were no longer received. Olive was the olive ridley turtle that was rehabilitated, tagged and released by Hol Chan Marine Reserve. She was released on August 8th, 2011 and sadly, her last signal was transmitted on August 21st, 2011. At that point she had travelled over 635 miles and was in the middle of the Gulf of Mexico. There are a number of reasons she may have stopped transmitting. Perhaps the transmitter was not securely attached and while passing beneath a rocky overhang, it was dislodged and fell to the ocean floor. The transmitter is only capable of sending signals from the surface of the water so if it was knocked to the ocean floor, signals would no longer be received. Another possibility is that the transmitter’s antenna could have been damaged in some manner and now is unable to send signals. There is always the possibility that the transmitter is no longer sending signal due to the mortality of Olive - but we are hopeful that this was not the case. Good luck Olive, wherever you may be - Perhaps we will see you swimming the Belizean waters some day in the future!

Tracking Other Turtles

Despite the sad news about Olive, there are other turtles that have been tagged and released from Belize! In the August 2011 newsletter, we told you about “PACT-Serenity”, however she is not alone. There are a total of three hawksbill turtles currently being tracked from Belize. You can follow their travels online at: www.seaturtle.org/tracking/?project_id=650

“Hope” was the first sea turtle to be tagged and released by Hawksbill Hope and Marymount University on July 2nd of this year. Since her tagging and release she has stayed around Manatee Bar and has nested multiple times.

“Peace” was the second hawksbill turtle to be tagged and released on July 16th, 2011. Since her release she was staying around Manatee Bar and nested a few times. However in the past few days, she has begun to move! She is currently offshore near the Placencia peninsula.

And finally, “PACT- Serenity” is still being tracked around the Manatee Bar area.
Adopted Beaches

Ambergris Caye
Athens Gate

Bacalar Chico Marine Reserve

Blue Tang Inn

Casa Dam Newly Adopted!
Christa Dam reports that their property has seawall in front of it, but they will assist with the in-water observation portion of the program.

Casa Tortuga Villa

Caye Casa Newly Adopted!
Julie Babcock reports that she does not know if turtles nest on the beach in front of their resort, but will begin monitoring it for nesting activity.

El Pescador Lodge & Villas
A special thanks to El Pescador for allowing ECOMAR to film for the Turtle Watch documentary on their property!

Las Terrazas Newly Adopted!
Helene Hess is an avid diver and has been recording turtles that she sees while diving. She walks the beach in front of their resort frequently. In Spring 2010, she found 7 hatchlings on their beach but isn’t sure if turtles nest on the beach.

SunBreeze Hotel & Suites

The Turtlemans’s House

Hopkins
Lebeha Cabanas

Jungle Jeanie by the Sea

Placencia Peninsula
Colibri House

Green Parrot Beach Houses

Robert’s Grove Beach Resort

Villa Topsy Gecko

Offshore Cayes
Lighthouse Reef Atoll

Miller’s Landing Resort

Royal Belize Reception

Reef’s End Lodge

South Water Caye

Corozal
Almond Tree Resort

Bayside Guest House

Serenity Sands
Bed & Breakfast

Caye Caulker Newly Adopted!

Barefoot Beach Belize
Report that due to rocky beachfront, they have not seen turtles nest in 7 years. However, they support the program and will assist with other monitoring programs.

Costa Maya Beach Cabanas
Tsunami Adventures reports that they do not know if turtles nest on their beach near the split but will begin monitoring their beach for activity.

Indigo Pearl
Joseph and Linda Radford do not know if turtles nest on their beach, but will begin monitoring it for turtle nesting activity.

Mara’s Place
Karissa Young reports that 20 years ago sea turtles frequently nested on the beach in front of Mara’s place. However, since the sea wall has been erected, no nesting activity has occurred.

Tree Tops Guesthouse
Doris Creasy reports that she has not seen or heard of turtles nesting on her beach or on Caye Caulker for the past 20 years.

Tropical Oasis
Tropical Oasis does not know if sea turtles nest on their beaches, but fully support the program and will begin monitoring.

Ways Nests can be Harmed

**Temperature.** Increased temperatures may cause egg mortality but more importantly, temperature determines the majority sex of the turtle eggs in the nest. If temperatures are warmer, the nest will be primarily female. Whereas if the temperatures are cooler, the nest will be primarily male. This emphasizes the importance of measuring the temperature of the sand around the nest on a daily basis.

**Natural Disaster.** More intense hurricanes can cause storm surge and flooding of the nests, drowning the developing hatchlings. This is the reason that the distance from high tide mark to the nest is an important data measurement. The beach may also be washed away and decrease nesting sites for turtles.

**Human Activity.** It is important for humans, and pets, to avoid disturbance of the nests. Way damage to nests frequently occurs is by crushing. It is important to avoid driving on turtle nesting beaches and to avoid using these beaches for camp fires and barbecues. Keeping pets, especially dogs, away from turtle nests is critical, as they may dig up nests or harm emerging hatchlings.
Sea Turtle
Reports Summary

From the end of July to present, we have had very few reports of sea turtles throughout the country.

**Boat.** We have had reports of 2 turtles seen from the surface. One was a small green turtle about 20 inches in length and spotted between Reef and Bridge in San Pedro. The other turtle was spotted between Mexico Rocks and Barge by Ambergris Caye. As best guess, the tourist believes the turtle was a large green turtle.

**Stranded.** SEA (Southern Environmental Association) has informed us of two turtle strandings. The first one was a small hawksbill spotted by Carlo Salvinelli from CISP, found floating on the surface just north of the Sapodilla Cayes Marine Reserve near Coco Solo Caye. The second was what is guessed to have been a loggerhead turtle found floating near Pompion Caye in southern Belize. This one had all its meat cut out and the carapace had been discarded making it difficult to identify. Look for more information on stranded turtles in next month’s newsletter.

**In-water.** During 2 snorkels at Gallows Point, no turtles were sighted. Of 16 dives that have been reported, 3 juvenile hawksbills, 1 juvenile green turtle, 2 loggerheads and 4 larger hawksbills have been sighted. Around the Gallows Point area, 8 dives were recorded with no turtles sighted; however the visibility was low. Around 8-9 miles north of San Pedro, on a single dive 3 Hawksbills were reported!

The more data we have, the more accurately we can record the abundance of sea turtles in Belize. Please help us by continuing or beginning to report your dives online or by text! We will continue to update our database and will be doing more in-depth analysis of the reports in the future.