

INJURIES OBSERVED IN NESTING FEMALES OF LOGGERHEAD TURTLES (CARETTA CARETTA, L.1758) ON BOA VISTA ISLAND (REPUBLIC OF CAPE VERDE, WESTERN AFRICA)

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Abstract

Different kinds of physical anomalies are frequently observed in any sea turtle breeding population. Nesting beaches are an excellent place to study the injuries and defects that occur in adult females. The archipelago of Cape Verde is situated about 500 km of Senegal, West Africa. Boavista is the eastern most island and may constitute the most important nesting area for the loggerhead turtle in the archipelago. The studies conducted from 1998 to 2004 indicate that Cape Verde might account for one of the most important loggerheads populations in the eastern Atlantic. The nesting females in Boavista were surveyed during the 2004 season, in order to (1) know the health status of the population (2) determine the effects of physical anomalies on nesting behaviour and (3) determine the possible origin of the injuries observed. A random survey of this nesting population was carried out to search for the cause of different lesions or injuries on the carapace and flippers and to check for the presence of fibropapilloma. A sample of 688 different turtles were included in the analysis. About 34.5% of the turtles surveyed showed some kind of external lesion, like fractures in carapace, tears, partial or total amputations, deformities, injuries and others. This value could increase approximately 20% if tears caused by tag loss in the trailing edge of both fore flippers were also included. We may conclude that lesions were, in general, light and occurred more frequently in the flippers. With respect to the nesting success, we observed that the occurrence of determinated lesions could reduce the nesting success. Related to the natural or anthropogenic origin of the lesions, it is important to remark that none of these turtles showed clear evidence of either damages caused by interactions with fisheries or boat traffic. Interactions with the environment and predators may also inflict marine turtles with a different set of lesions. We have observed that 23% of our injured turtles showed signs of shark attack. It is interesting to confirm that the nesting colony of *Caretta caretta* in Boavista have not shown fibropapilloma-like lesions.