

Scoring goals and sharing the love for marine turtle conservation in Central America

In a world overflowing with messages of doom and gloom it is easy to forget our capacity for positivity and the difference it can make to our motivation. There is no doubt that globally people are subject to many pressures and concerns in their day-to-day lives and these stresses share common themes across many different walks of life. In the conservation world two key and often related issues are the environment and economics. Finding creative solutions to the seemingly ever-increasing challenges is integral to conservation, and sharing and promoting the successes, rather than focusing on the negative, is often a challenge. Non-governmental organizations are constantly searching for new ways to engage communities and the wider public to foster support for conservation.

An example of the impacts of economic pressures is seen in many low-income coastal regions, where residents frequently view marine turtle eggs as an economic resource. This is reinforced by a cultural and traditional legacy in which the consumption of eggs is a social norm. Today, conservation initiatives must offer a higher economic incentive for the protection of eggs and turtles than would otherwise be received from alternate uses (even if those are illegal). This is particularly true for hawksbill eggs in El Salvador and Nicaragua; conservation legislation formed by top-down, non-participatory measures has failed to protect hawksbill nests in both countries. However, the purchase of hawksbill nests for protection is financially unsustainable and does little to foment a positive local conservation ethic.

Fauna & Flora International (FFI) and the Eastern Pacific Hawksbill Initiative (ICAPO), two NGOs that cooperate on turtle conservation across the Eastern Pacific region of Central America, have been running an initiative in the 2012 nesting season to add non-economic values to hawksbill eggs. The Copa Carey (Hawksbill Regional Cup, <http://www.hawksbill.org/hawksbillcup.html>), is a friendly competition, emulating the Football World Cup, aimed at increasing interest and participation from the local communities who live around the two most important hawksbill nesting sites in the region (Estero Padre Ramos in Nicaragua, and Bahia Jiquilillo in El Salvador). Unifying the communities through healthy international competition, where the winner of the 'final match' is the team who scores the most conservation goals, awarded according to a variety of categories such as number of hawksbill nests protected and number of hatchlings released.

By presenting the 2012 turtle season to the participating communities in a new light the hope is to influence, in a positive way, perceptions and values relating to turtles and conservation activities. This initiative has drawn on the local people's love of and pride in competition (referencing football and goals) to encourage participation.

In another initiative this idea of building connections between people and nature is scaled up nationally through FFI Nicaragua's campaign against the sale and consumption of turtle eggs and products: Yo No Como Huevos de Tortuga (I Don't Eat Turtle Eggs). Its objective is to raise awareness and deter people from the illegal use and consumption of turtle eggs and products. The campaign has been running for 4 years and unites people by creating a sense of pride and passion about the uniqueness of nature in their country.

The significance of creating connections between people, nature and the environment should not be overlooked as a valuable tool to increase conservation awareness and participation. Instilling or reigniting a sense of wonder and enthusiasm, whilst building awareness for species and their habitat, is at the heart of a campaign recently launched by IUCN at Jeju (<http://www.iucn.org/cec>). FFI Nicaragua's Yo No Como Huevos de Tortuga campaign is one of three examples in the IUCN campaign focused on personalizing, humanizing and publicizing stories about nature and conservation. To protect nature IUCN aims to help people fall in love with it again. Communicating creatively and presenting stories that people can relate to not only raises awareness but also shift people's attitudes and behaviour to conservation, creating as IUCN says 'A love story'.

With the hawksbill nesting season not yet over, the FFI and ICAPO teams cannot fully analyse the impact the Copa Carey has had on the community's attitudes. However, Jose Urteaga, FFI Nicaragua's Country Coordinator, has noted that 'The communities have been extremely motivated since the generation of some healthy patriotic competition. Injecting creativity into the projects and positively raising the profile of the work, not only to the communities directly involved, but also nationally via the Yo No Como Huevos de Tortuga campaign is, and will continue to be, integral to the continued success of the turtle projects'.

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Camera traps reveal man-eater's history

Man-eating tigers have terrified and fascinated people in equal measure throughout India's history. In *shikar* literature various explanations have been offered for this so-called malady among tigers, and leopards, by erstwhile big-game hunters of the colonial era. Perhaps the most popular among these were the views of legendary hunter and pioneer conservationist Edward James (Jim) Corbett, who blamed injury and, more often, old age for pushing tigers to opt for easier human prey. Other hunters, naturalists and experts have espoused similar views, based mostly on anecdotal evidence.