

## Chapter 28

### Brief report on the status of turtles in Angola

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Sporadic reports from the 1970s and 1980s indicated that extensive nesting and non-nesting marine turtle populations occurred on the coast of Angola, from the northern province of Cabinda south to the Namibian border at the Cunene River. Generally however, the distribution and status of marine turtles along this ~1650 km coastline is not well known. More recently, between 2000 and 2006, several surveys were conducted in Angolan waters or along the coast, in search of marine turtles. These included dedicated nesting surveys at Palmeirinhas, pelagic surveys off northern Angola, casual beach surveys along most of the Angolan coastline and interviews at fishing communities and markets.

Of the turtle species that were recorded, the Green Turtle *Chelonia mydas* is perhaps the most abundant. Although their distribution is uneven, nesting of this species has been widely documented in many regions, including Cabinda and Quicombo. Nesting populations of the Green Turtle are also known to occur in the waters of neighbouring countries, including the Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is thought that Mussulo Bay and the mouth of the Cunene River may comprise important year-round feeding areas for all age classes of this species.

Angola is one of the most important nesting areas, worldwide, for the Olive Ridley Turtle *Lepidochelys olivacea*, which has been recorded at locations around Cabinda, Ambriz, Luanda, Rio Longa, Quicombo and Lobito. At-sea sightings of this species have been reported along the entire coast, particularly within the Bay of Bengo and the Bay of Cabinda.

The Leatherback Turtle *Dermochelys coriacea* appears to

be rare in Angola; those that occur here are likely a continuum of the large nesting population in Gabon. This species nests widely and has been documented in Cabinda and throughout the 200 km stretch of coast south of Luanda including Quicombo and Rio Longa. Both adults and subadults of this species have been observed at sea, quite close to the coast.

While the Hawksbill Turtle *Eretmochelys imbricata* has been reported to occur in Angola, their status is unknown and there are no confirmed instances of nesting. The status of the Loggerhead Turtle *Caretta caretta* in the region is also unclear. This species is reported to nest along the Skeleton Coast in Namibia and may therefore be expected to also nest in southern Angola.

In summary, nesting of the Green, Olive Ridley and Leatherback Turtles in Angola, have been confirmed. The breeding status of the other two species which have been recorded in Angola, the Loggerhead and Hawksbill Turtles, are uncertain. All the above are classified as either endangered (Green, Olive Ridley and Loggerhead) or critically endangered (Leatherback and Hawksbill) by the IUCN, and are included on Appendix I of CITES which prohibits international trade to or from the signatory countries. Disturbingly, there is some evidence of a decline in turtle numbers in Angola since the 1980s, when the density of turtles along the coast in the vicinity of Luanda was estimated at 75 nests per km. During more recent surveys, conducted from 2003–2006, the density of nests in this region was estimated to have declined to below 40 per km.