

Hats off to Sea Turtles

Written by Kandy Curran, Tuesday 28 June 2016



Will sea turtles, a 200 million year evolutionary stand-out, survive climate change and over-population?

Did you know, sea turtles have evolved special 'homing' abilities, which will see them return to precisely the same beach where they hatched after 30 to 50 years?

It is this ability that brings Flatback turtles to Broome's beaches for nesting!

These graceful creatures are revered by many cultures across the globe, and so it was a privilege to have Yawuru Ranger Preston Manado open the Science on the Broome Coast presentation, Sea Turtles: Iconic ambassadors linking marine habitats, cultures and regions on June 8, 2016.

Preston explained the significance of Yawuru saltwater seasons to sea turtles – starting with Laja and Man-gala when the gurlibil (Flatback turtle) lay their eggs on Broome's beaches.

"Gurlibil is out to sea during the colder months of Barrgana, which we are having now. During Wirlburu, the warming up season when the westerly winds start to blow, Gurlibil start mating and shouldn't be disturbed." Preston Manado said.



Ground view of turtle tracks at Cape Domett. © Parks and Wildlife

The next presenter, Dr Scott Whiting, who is working on a project for the WA Marine Science Institution, focused on the biology of sea turtles, the threats they are facing - particularly from climate change, and research underway on the Kimberley coast.

Dr Whiting had the audience ‘taking their hats off’ to sea turtles, with their amazing biology and evolutionary history.

“Did you know sea turtles can dive up to 1000 metres and take 30 to 50 years to reach puberty, then breed for 30 years? This means that conservation initiatives have to be considered in terms of decades and centuries.” Dr Whiting said.

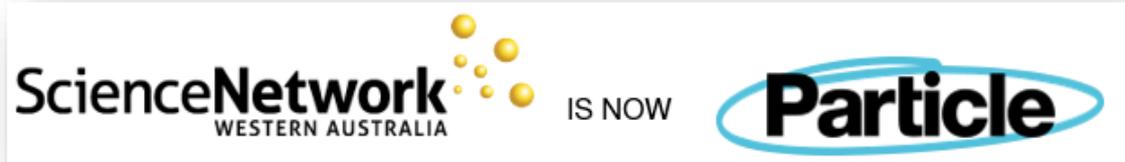
A wandering microphone allowed the large audience to ask a stream of fascinating questions, including, how do turtles mate? And did you know that females are promiscuous and can be mated by several males, resulting in several fathers?

The bigger question is, will this 200 million year evolutionary stand-out, survive climate change and over-population?

The next Science on Broome Coast presentation is Corals, canaries and cockroaches: A natural history of coral reefs on June 29 at the University of Notre Dame in Broome.

This innovative Science on the Broome Coast series is sponsored by Inspiring Australia, The University of Notre Dame Broome, Yawuru Land and Sea Unit, Western Australia Marine Science Institution, Rangelands NRM through the Federal Government Landcare Program and the Department of Parks and Wildlife.

See the 2016 Science on Broome Coast program and posters for each presentation.



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