



30 November 2016

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NEWS

More than 25000 green turtles to arrive on Raine Island for nesting season (QLD, Australia)

23 November 2016, *Newsport*

Researchers from the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service were kept busy on their first trip to Raine Island this month for the current green turtle nesting season, tagging more than 1200 turtles. Environment Minister Dr Steven Miles said this season approximately 25,000-30,000 turtles were expected to come ashore to lay at the remote island on the northern tip of Australia's Great Barrier Reef.

The Raine Island Recovery Project is a five-year, \$7.95 million collaboration between BHP Billiton, the Queensland Government, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, the Wuthathi Nation and the Kemer Kemer Meriam Nation (Ugar, Mer, Erub) Traditional Owners and the Great Barrier Reef Foundation. This is the third intensive monitoring season since part of the nesting beach was re-shaped to combat erosion that was badly affecting the turtles' chances of nesting successfully.

Raine Island Recovery Project Scientist and turtle researcher Dr Andy Dunstan said the numbers of turtles visiting Raine Island fluctuates each year because turtles do not nest annually. Dr Dunstan said a series of research trips to Raine Island were planned for the current breeding season, which ends in April 2017, to closely monitor the resilience of the green turtle population that nests on the island.

more..... <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html>

Seagrass spotters sought (UK)

22 November 2016, West Highland Free Press

A marine conservation charity is urging West Highland residents to record sightings of a coastal plant they say is under threat. Seagrass populations are disappearing due to pollution, climate change and human disturbance, according to researchers from Project Seagrass.

The flowering plant — which lives under the waves in shallow, sheltered areas of the coast — are places where young fish like cod, haddock, plaice and herring grow and hide.

The charity want to get the public to use a simple 'Seagrass Spotter' app. They are asking people to take a picture of any seagrass sightings around the coast, allowing researchers to build a map of where seagrass is present around the islands. The 'Seagrass Spotter' app can be found at www.seagrassspotter.org.

more..... <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html>

Marine Conservation Zone could protect Isle of Wight seagrass (UK)

18 November 2016, Isle of Wight County Press

Five hundred acres of seagrass meadow, off the Isle of Wight, could be protected as part of a Marine Conservation Zone. The government has announced proposals for a third tranche of areas across the UK to protect marine life.

The stretch of sea between Norris and Ryde has been proposed by as an area worthy of protection. An area around the Needles has already been designated as an MCZ, as one of 50 already protected areas across the country. The Norris to Ryde section was original proposed when MCZ were first consulted on, but was dropped, much to the disappointment of the Hampshire and IW Wildlife Trust.

It is home to seagrass covering an area equivalent to 200 football pitches, which helps prevent erosion and to stabilise the sea bottom. It also provides hiding places for fish and other creatures to live and spawn.

Melissa Moore, of the Marine Conservation Society said: "The 50 Marine Conservation Zones being recommended by the government's scientific advisors are essential to ensure we are protecting examples of all habitats. They will allow a proportion of our seas to begin to recover from over a century of damage and contribute to the restoration of biodiversity in our seas. We call on government to include all these sites in their third tranche consultation next summer."

more..... <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html>

More than 30 rare dugongs filmed off coast of Western Region town (Abu Dhabi, UAE)

17 November 2016, The National

A nature enthusiast managed to capture on film more than 30 rare dugongs, including cows with their calves, in the Western Region. The footage was taken this week by Shamsa Al Hameli on the edges of the Marawah -Marine Biosphere Reserve, near the town of Mirfa. Ms Al Hameli is an environmental biology graduate and co-founder of the Abu Dhabi Marine Conservation Group, which raises awareness about rare marine animals and the need to protect them.

Taken from a drone, the video shows a group of about 36 dugongs feeding on seagrass, while people in two kayaks -observe them. The Abu Dhabi resident first started recording sightings of dugongs and other rare marine creatures five years ago. For the past four years she has used drones to film her findings, which are reported to the Environment Agency Abu -Dhabi. Sometimes Ms Al Hameli finds bodies of the rare animals washed up on the shore after -being caught up in fishing nets. Luckily, the group of dugongs Ms Al Hameli recorded this week appeared to be in good health.

About 1,500 dugongs live in the Marawah reserve. The placid mammals can weigh up to 300 kilograms. They are harmless to people and feed on seagrass.

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Scullion backs hunting of endangered animals (Australia)

14 November 2016, TropicNow

Indigenous Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion has defended traditional hunting at a graduation ceremony for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rangers in Cairns. Native title laws allow traditional owners to hunt endangered turtles and dugongs. Wildlife identity Bob Irwin has recently called for a moratorium on current practices but Mr Scullion says hunting isn't the problem. "Yes, there are some threats to dugongs and turtles. But none of them come from the ocean, they all come from the land and they're all associated with degradation of habitat."

Indigenous ranger Mick Hale runs a turtle hospital, Yuku-Baja-Muliku, with his wife, Larissa, at Archer Point more than 300 kilometres north of Cairns. "We started about six years ago," Mr Hale says. "It came about around the time Cyclone Larry and Cyclone Yasi decimated our seagrass beds. Traditional hunting can be sustainable, Mr Hale says. The biggest challenge for us is getting the public to understand that traditional hunting is the smallest percentage of mortality for turtles and dugongs," he says.

Mr Scullion won't be backing down on the issue of traditional hunting, despite calls from fellow Coalition MP Warren Entsch for further investigation. Despite speculation former Prime Minister Tony Abbott wants his job, Mr Scullion says he has no intention of vacating the role.

[more..... http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html](http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html)

Call to help map coastline plant (UK)

12 November 2016, John O'Groat Journal

Caithnessians are being called on to help build a map of where seagrass can be found around northern Scotland. The Scottish marine conservation charity Project Seagrass is trying to monitor and map remaining populations. It is asking for people's help by using a Seagrass Spotter app to take a picture of any seagrass sightings around the coast.

Researchers believe with so little known about the seagrass around Caithness, the chances are people will be discovering populations no one has found before.

Healthy seagrass meadows are places for young fish to grow, hide and find food. Other benefits of the underwater gardens include more oxygen to breathe, more carbon being locked away in their leaves and roots, and protection for sandy coastlines. The app can be found on both the app and play store or at seagrassspotter.org

[more..... http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html](http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html)

All hunting of dugongs, turtles must end: activist (Australia)

11 November 2016, The Australian

Wildlife activist Colin Riddell has criticised the government's attempts to crack down on illegal indigenous hunting of dugongs and sea turtles, saying it must also target law-abiding Aborigines who take the animals for personal, domestic or communal needs. The declaration comes as three federal ministers commit to talk to indigenous rangers and the Queensland state government to spearhead moves that could see more "no take" zones introduced in a bid to stop the vulnerable -species being poached and traded, as revealed in The Australian last month.

Influential crossbench senator Derryn Hinch, who has flagged support for a "100 per cent ban" on the practice, is also set to travel to north Queensland by year's end to learn more about the issue and increase pressure on the government to act. Under native title laws, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can hunt marine turtles and dugongs for "personal, domestic or non-commercial communal needs". But Senator Hinch claimed people were killing and "chasing" the animals in powered motorboats with guns and said this conduct could not be part of any culture: "This isn't killing for -survival."

The North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance says commercialisation claims have been found to be "unsubstantiated", while environmental groups point out that dugongs and turtles face far greater threats than hunting, including loss of habitat, marine debris and coastal development.

[more..... http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html](http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html)

AI experts build 'neural network' to help researchers search for dugongs (Australia)

10 November 2016, ABC Online

Dugong expert Dr Amanda Hodgson estimates she has stared at more than 30,000 photographs of blue water. The researcher from WA's Murdoch University has been scanning pictures captured by aerial drones in a search for dugongs, to work out their population, size and location.

Dr Hodgson said aerial surveys were regularly conducted off the coast of Queensland, in the Torres Strait and Shark Bay off Western Australia. But drones had allowed researchers to survey areas that previously could not be reached. But it also meant researchers had to manually check the tens of thousands of images they captured. That has taken a team hundreds of hours.

Enter Queensland University of Technology artificial intelligence expert Dr Frederic Maire. He and a colleague used software called TensorFlow to create an artificial neural network to detect dugongs in the aerial images. Dr Maire said it had to be trained to spot dugongs, with researchers uploading images and pointing out the mammals. Now the network is searching images on its own. It scans the tens of thousands of photos of blue water and identifies dugongs. The system's detections are then verified by Dr Hodgson's team. Dr Maire said it had been detecting 80 per cent of the dugongs, but its success rate was expected to improve.

[more..... http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html](http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html)

Related article:

How Do You Spot an 800-Pound Sea Cow? With a Drone (TakePart)

<http://www.takepart.com/article/2016/11/12/how-scientists-are-using-drones-and-ai-id-dugongs-sea-cows>

Spike in turtle deaths along the Kosgoda coastal belt GILL KILL (Sri Lanka)

09 November 2016, Daily Mirror

Sri Lanka is home to five different species of turtles that are found in various habitats. However, it was reported that during the last five to ten months, many turtles have been killed due to suspicious fishing activities, especially along the Kosgoda coastal belt. When the Daily Mirror visited the Victor Hasselblad Sea Turtle Conservation and Research Centre in Kosgoda, we learned that turtles had been victims of various inhumane fishing activities, which had been carried out during the recent past.

Speaking to us, the owner of this turtle conservation centre, Chandrasiri Abrew said that turtles are usually eaten by sharks or due to gill nets used by fishermen. People also use dynamite for fishing and this is another killer. Turtles [also] have a higher tendency to feed on polythene, because it appears to them like jellyfish.

Speaking to the Daily Mirror, the General Manager/ Chief Executive Officer of the Marine Environment Protection Authority Dr. Terney Pradeep Kumara said that the extensive use of gill nets are the probable cause of these sudden deaths. Once they come to the surface they get entangled in these nets and drown. Since many turtles have been killed during the last few months as reported, a proper investigation including autopsies on dead turtles should be conducted. Speaking to the Daily Mirror, Mahendra Jayatileka representing the National Aquatic Resources Authority (NARA) said that so far no survey had been done to find out the reducing number of turtles.

[more..... http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html](http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html)

Growing grass in the sea: Why replanting eelgrass is so important for PEI (Canada)

07 November 2016, CBC.ca

Eelgrass is disappearing in eastern P.E.I., in part because of nitrates mostly from the agricultural zone. When excess fertilizer gets in the water, it causes sea lettuce to grow rapidly and it smothers the eelgrass, which gets no light and dies. Now a local environmental group is fighting back, by learning how to re-grow the seagrass.

Fred Cheverie, long-time coordinator of the Souris and Area Branch of the Wildlife Federation, started by doing research and talking to people who've tried transplanting eel grass in other parts of Canada. They came up with a method that he describes as "fairly cheap and it works." In the fall of 2015, Cheverie and his crew decided to create a plot of eelgrass, 10 metres square, in the estuary of the Souris River. They waited until the water temperature dropped below 15 degrees, and then collected eelgrass shoots that washed ashore during a storm, storing them in a cooler filled with saltwater. Next, they experimented with shells, looking for a way to anchor the eelgrass shoots to the ocean bottom. Oyster shells, it turned out, worked best. Using an electric drill, they created half a dozen or so holes per oyster shell. The eelgrass shoots were then weaved through the holes so that the root part would be in the bottom and the concave part was on top. Then it is dropped to the bottom in the new area and the sand fills up in the little concave system and it weighs it down and holds it there and that gives an opportunity for the little grass shoots to catch and start to grow.

This year's eelgrass planting is in a different part of the Souris River, upstream from the estuary. But Cheverie is very aware that the experiment could still go wrong if the eelgrass is put in an area where there are green crabs. This year's planting is the first of the three year project. For this fall, the group has received \$1,500 in funding from Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Cheverie and his team will monitor both plots of eelgrass, in the hopes that they are landed on a formula that works.

[more..... http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html](http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html)

Call for signage to save dugong from jetskis and boaties (QLD, Australia)

04 November 2016, Redland City Bulletin

A resident has called for signage at boat ramps, warning jet ski and speed boat drivers of large numbers of dugong and calves in southern parts of the bay. Dave Knight said he had lived in the Redlands for 30 years and never seen so many dugong. Last week more than 20 were between Pannikin and St Clair islands over seagrass beds.

more..... <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html>

Fisheries Department calls for MoU on dugong conservation (Malaysia)

03 November 2016, Astro Awani

The Fisheries Department hopes the government would sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Dugong Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) by March next year to help preserve the conservation of dugongs in the country. Its director-general Datuk Ismail Abu Hassan said the signing of the MoU was vital to enable Malaysia to be part of an international platform for protecting and conserving the dugong species as it has been involved in dugong conservation since 1998.

At present, 26 countries have already signed the MoU with CMS. Not many countries have dugong in their waters and in Malaysia, more than 100 dugongs have been discovered with the majority in Johor. The Dugong MoU aims to promote internationally coordinated action to ensure the long-term survival of dugongs and their seagrass habitats throughout their extensive range. Ismail said the distribution of dugongs in Malaysia primarily lies in Johor, Sarawak and Sabah where in Johor alone, at least 26 dugongs have been observed by the Fisheries Department alongside the Marine Park Department.

Meanwhile, the Programme Manager responsible for the implementation of the Dugong MoU under the United Nations Environment Programme, Dr Donna Kwan said dugongs required 40kg of seagrass a day to survive. She said dugongs faced a high risk of being drowned in the midst of seeking seagrass for food by getting entangled in fish gear as dugongs need to breathe every seven to five minutes. Dugongs are protected under the Fisheries Act 1985 and the Fisheries Regulations 1999 (Control of Endangered Species of Fish) for Peninsular Malaysia and Federal Territories of Labuan, Wildlife Protection Ordinance 1998 and the Wildlife Conservation Enactment 1997 for Sarawak and Sabah.

more..... <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html>

Related articles:

Let us Save Malaysia's last Dugongs (Clean Malaysia)

<https://cleanmalaysia.com/2016/11/03/let-us-save-malysias-last-dugongs/>

Fisheries Department calls for MoU on dugong conservation (astro AWANI)

<http://english.astroawani.com/malaysia-news/fisheries-department-calls-mou-dugong-conservation-121281>

Photo of men 'surfing' on turtle at Fraser Island investigated by Queensland Parks and Wildlife (QLD, Australia)

02 November 2016, ABC Online

An image showing two men 'surfing' on a protected green turtle on Fraser Island is being investigated by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS). The image was originally shared on an Instagram account, with the caption reading "Surfed a tortoise on zee weekend ... gnarly dudddeeeee". A QPWS spokesperson said the maximum penalty for interfering with a natural resource such as a green turtle was \$19,965. QPWS are taking this matter seriously and investigating further.

Gold Coast man Matt Wright re-shared the image after it appeared in his Facebook feed on Monday night. Mr Wright, who volunteers at animal rescue service Wildcare, said he was upset by what he saw. Hundreds of comments under Mr Wright's post described the two men's actions as "idiotic", "shameful" and "disgusting".

Last month the QPWS began investigating the circumstances behind the discovery of multiple turtle carcasses near Elliott Heads, east of Bundaberg. Under Commonwealth law, only traditional owners with native title rights can legally hunt marine turtles, with the maximum penalty for any breach including a \$365,000 fine or two years in jail.

more..... <http://www.seagrasswatch.org/news.html>

CONFERENCES

Coastal & Estuarine Research Federation 24th Biennial Conference (CERF2017) (Providence, Rhode Island, USA, 5-9 November 2017)

Theme: Coastal Science at the Inflection Point: Celebrating Successes & Learning from Challenges

The CERF 2017 scientific program offers four days of, timely, exciting and diverse information on a vast array of estuarine and coastal subjects. Presentations will examine new findings within CERF's traditional science, education and management disciplines and encourage interaction among coastal and estuarine scientists and managers. Additionally, the Scientific Program Committee plans to convene special sessions and workshops that promote intellectually stimulating discussions. Join us and over a thousand of your colleagues to network, celebrate our work, learn from each other and grow within our amazing profession.

for more information, visit <http://www.erf.org/cerf-2017-biennial-conference>

The 13th International Seagrass Biology Workshop (ISBW13) and World Seagrass Conference (June 2018, Singapore)

Theme: Under pressure – Seagrass science and conservation in stressful environments

The International Seagrass Biology Workshop (ISBW) is the only international meeting specifically tailored to seagrass scientists, professionals and students. The International Seagrass Biology Workshop (ISBW) provides a good opportunity for the scientists working on various aspects of seagrass ecosystems to come together and discuss their latest findings. The ISBW13 will be held in June 2018 at the National University of Singapore, Singapore, organized by National University of Singapore, National Parks Board, and DHI Water & Environment, Singapore.
more information soon...

SEAGRASS-WATCH on YouTube

Seagrass: Pastures of the sea <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=66Y5vgswj20> or
<http://www.seagrasswatch.org/seagrass.html>

Presentation on what seagrasses are and why they are important (over 43,225 views to date)

...seagrass matters blog

World Seagrass Association blog <http://wsa.seagrassonline.org/blog/>

Keep up to date on what's happening around the world from the WSA with regular updates from WSA President Dr Richard Unsworth and *notes from the field* by Dr Siti Yaakub.

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