UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
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December 19, 1980

TO: F/IA - Carmen J. Blondin

THRU: F/SEC - William W. Fox, Jr.

FROM: F/SEC5 - Larry H. Ogren

SUBJ: Trip report -- travel to foreign country, San Jose, Costa Rica, 13-18 November, 1980.

Attended the open meeting of the Steering Committee and Technical Team of the SSTRWCA (Symposium on Sea Turtle Research in the Western Central Atlantic) at San Jose, Costa Rica on November 15, 1980. Mr. Frederick Berry, F/SEC x 4, chaired the meeting. The attendees were given a briefing on the background of the symposium by Dr. Manuel Murillo, of the University of Costa Rica. Mr. Harvey Bullis discussed the purpose of the Symposium and Dr. Robert Lankford, IOCARIBE, summarized the responses from foreign countries with regard to invitations to participate in the Symposium and identify a National Representative. Dr. Peter Bacon, Symposium Consultant, gave a detailed explanation on what is expected from participating countries in the form of a Standardized National Report. I discussed the types of sea turtle surveys we are planning for the 1981 season and the importance of characterizing the shoreline in terms of its potential for providing suitable nesting habitat. Drafts of a manual on conservation and research techniques were circulated for comments, additions and corrections. Substantial contributions by individuals would be recognized -- a multi-authored manual is anticipated. Dr. Archie Carr, Steering Committee Member, presented a film on the reproductive behavior of the five genera of sea turtles and narrated the salient aspects of mating behavior. Dr. Peter Pritchard presented slides on a recent aerial survey of Mexico's Pacific coast where extensive leatherback nesting was taking place. Dr. Pritchard was invited to participate in the Symposium as a member of the Technical Team, which he accepted on 11/17/80. Copies of the National Report forms were also distributed to the attendees in order to get their comments and also provide more information on what is expected of participating countries. Pre-prints of 32 color illustrations of the different species and age classes of sea turtles for the technical manual were also distributed.

The open meeting was well-attended and, as hoped for, many of the people that had come to the Spiny Lobster Workshop and Gulf and Caribbean Research Institute, 33rd Annual Meeting, the preceding week had stayed over to attend the open meeting of the SSTRWCA.

On November 17, the Steering Committee convened for a major Symposium planning session. The 1981 research program was discussed and coordination of assignments by the committee membership was planned. In addition, the date for the Symposium was firmly established, and will take place July, 1982, in San Jose, Costa Rica. The agenda of the Symposium was outlined by Mr. Bullis. Afterwards, the Technical Team met and discussed the establishment of a data collection center and cooperative tagging program. Most members agreed that a reward system is necessary for an international tagging program to be successful. Mexico and Costa Rica -- the CCC, were most adamant in supporting the reward system. It was agreed that some country, or organization other than the U.S. and NMFS, should be designated as the data collection "center". However, with regard to tagging programs, it was unanimous that the NMFS should provide a computerized tagging log system for all countries and projects in order that valuable recapture data, not otherwise obtained by conventional means - tag removed and sent to addressee - can be speedily sent to the proper researcher and the person capturing the turtle, and that all the various alpha-numeric coding systems for tags can be recognized as to their origin. This proposed service to all turtle researchers by the NMFS would be much appreciated and function as a first step in the centralization of tagging and recapture information by cooperating researchers.

Other technical team business included discussions on what countries will be officially participating, and what countries host significant populations of sea turtles and need to be surveyed, with or without support from the host countries. The spirit of the assistance that may be available to foreign countries by the Western Atlantic Survey conducted by the Caribbean Conservation Corporation (CCC) and the NMFS was taken into consideration. The consensus was that "NEEDY" countries should be given all the assistance within the limits of the total effort. Some countries only will require training, and some will require neither training nor support. Others will require experienced personnel and support; a few need only a modicum of support -- such as fuel for survey flights. A list of countries and their anticipated needs, both training and/or support is being prepared, along with a designated research priority.

In conclusion, Dr. Jorge Carranza (Mexico), suggested that this Symposium be officially designated the Western Atlantic Symposium-Symposium Tortuga Atlantico Occidental and go by the acronym WATS-STAO.

STEERING COMMITTEE
Ad Hoc Meeting Attendees; Nov. 17, 1980.

F. Berry (NMFS)
H. Bullis (USA)
R. Lankford (Costa Rica-IOCARIBE)
J. Carranza (Mexico)
A. Carr (USA)
R. Marquez (Mexico)
P. Bacon (United Kingdom)
H. Reichart (Suriname)
P. Pritchard (USA)
L. Ogren (NMFS)