



TURTLE TIMES



On the eastern coast of Boavista there is a remote desert beach called Cruz do Morto. It is a small paradise with small white sand beaches separated by amazing rock formations. Large dunes formed behind and the endless big blue stretches ahead with the West African shores too far to see. It is a special place where many loggerhead turtles come to nest every year and that is when paradise becomes hell. Due to its remote location Cruz do Morto was always in the limbo of turtle protection. In between two major poaching areas but too far from the base of operations to cover. Poachers soon discovered that and the slaughter began. However, since 2017, Turtle Foundation pulled together the resources necessary to operate a small camp and so Cruz do Morto joined the "family". Although turtle bones are a common sight in the dunes behind the beach, things are much safer for the turtles now and our team operates on a daily basis under coordinator Joylton's guidance to ensure just that. Cruz do Morto Camp is a fantastic place on a special location but more than that, it makes the difference for turtle conservation in Boavista.



Sea turtles face many dangers throughout their lives different stages. When they are eggs, they are vulnerable to ghost crabs and other predators like dogs that can dig the nest to eat the eggs. When they hatch, they make a run for the sea and again, face their predators (crabs, nocturnal mammals), exhaustion, blockades between them and the water, and disorientation. As soon as they reach the ocean, a new set of dangers awaits: several species of fish and birds see the baby turtles as an easy meal. For the lucky ones that reach maturity are now big enough to attract the attention of larger predators, such as sharks. Of course, human factors play a big part as well: pollution, poaching, and damage by boats while at sea. It is common to see turtles coming to nest with a damaged carapace, missing bits, probably caused when hit by a boat. Also with damages to the flippers, sometimes cut clean. It was the case of turtle found by our team in Curral Velho Camp, where a turtle came to nest with a cut front flipper. It was an old injury, already healed and probably caused by a shark attack or a boat propeller. However, animals learn to adapt to this situations and this turtle knows how to survive and live her live like nothing ever happen.



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Early this year Fundação Tartaruga joined Projeto Tartaruga Boavista, a cooperation between several NGO, governmental entities and partners to work for the communities and preservation of the island's natural resources, with special emphasis on sea turtles. The project will focus on three main tasks: community development, environmental education and scientific research. Fundação Tartaruga will concentrate its efforts and resources on community development, something we consider crucial in any conservation project. Our community coordinator, Carla, has been working around the clock to develop and implement activities and actions that will help the local communities in Boavista. This project will act over the course of a couple of years and there is much to do across the island. Carla already coordinated some activities, specifically in the Norte communities that play a major role in Boavista's social dynamics and, because they are quite far from the island's capital Sal Rei, tend to have low priority. The villages of João Galego, Fundo de Figueiras e Cabeça de Trefes (which form the community of Norte) are full of life, culture, and potential, and although they fit in many post cards and guidebooks, the majority of the tourist leaves Boavista without going there, or just pass through. Small communities, not by the sea shore (even if close), have to survive through agriculture and cattle farming, and that proves hard work in such a barren and dry place. Lack of medical facilities and schools (with exception of primary grade) contributes to further isolation and exodus of that population to Sal Rei.



Our community development plan goes through several stages, and it first started focused on children. Two activities were organized to bring them together and to show new life opportunities: art and theatre class, and DIY percussion instruments workshop. Over the course of 3 weeks, a group of 24 children learned about art, theatre, wrote their own play that they rehearsed and then acted for the communities. At the same time there was a 1 month workshop happening: build and learn how to play homemade percussion instruments. The children explored their culture through music and performed for the community in the end of the workshop. Later on another workshop was organized, this one featuring women looking for an extra income source: homemade soap! With the duration of a week, 15 ladies learned how to make different scented soap at home using day-to-day ingredients. This income generating activity provided the training necessary so these women can now make and sell their own soap and have an extra income source for their families.

Photo contributions: Camilo Carrasco, Délvis Pires, Carla Corsino.