



## PRESS RELEASE

*Cayenne, October 25, 2023*

# Season 2023 : clutches on the rise, but many threats remain

French Guiana, haven for leatherback, green and olive ridley turtles. As in previous years, a monitoring of clutches was carried out along French Guiana's coastline. The results are encouraging compared to the previous year, although the number of egg-laying females visiting the region's beaches has been declining for the past fifteen years. Indeed, the region is prey to a number of clearly identified threats, with dramatic consequences for the surrounding biodiversity.

Once again this year, egg-laying was monitored by rangers from the Réserve Naturelle Nationale de l'Amana (RNA) in the west, by the Kwata association in the east, and by the Office Français de la Biodiversité (OFB) in Kourou.

In the west, only **106 leatherback turtle nests** have been counted on Yalimapo beach. Several threats may explain this decline, but foreign IUU fishing (illegal, unreported and unregulated) and the resulting by-catches remain the region's biggest source of concern.

In the east, however, the situation is more favorable, with **1,609 nests observed in Cayenne and Rémire-Montjoly**. These figures are higher than those of 2020 (only 330 clutches throughout French Guiana), although they remain below those recorded fifteen years ago.

For **green turtles**, despite uneven beach attendance from year to year, this season's figures are encouraging. Data are 94% concentrated on western sites of the country, including **1,945 nests at Awala-**

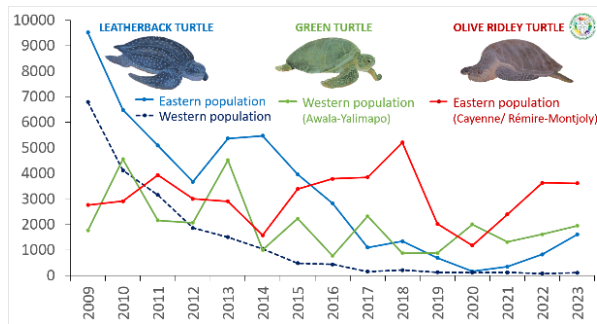
**Yalimapo**. While in the east, 186 green turtle nests were observed. On a broader time scale, the number of green turtle nests in French Guiana is trending downwards, indicating the need for continued annual monitoring.

In contrast to green turtles, **olive ridley turtles** show a major preference for eastern beaches, with 98% of their hatchlings located in Cayenne and Rémire-Montjoly. A total of **3,675 nests** have been counted for this season, stagnating compared to last year's figures (3,723 nests in 2022), but good results for this species, which had seen a staggering 75% drop in clutches between 2018 and 2020, and thus hosted only 1,293 clutches in the whole of Guiana in 2020.

More occasional monitoring was also carried out on the beaches of Aztèque (1,108 green, 56 olive ridley and 43 leatherback nests), Malmanoury (over 200 nests of all species), Kourou (7 green, 6 leatherback and 4 olive ridley nests), Ile Saint Joseph, Ilet la Mère and Farez. In addition, 5 hawksbill turtle nests were observed in the east.



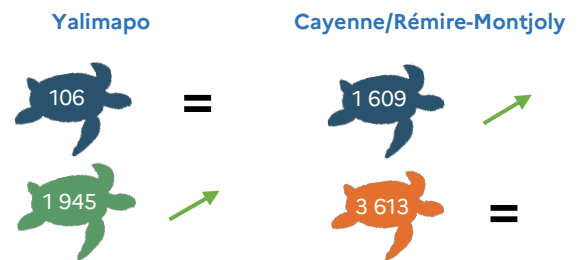
**Leatherback turtle laying eggs on Salines beach**  
Crédit : Rachel Berzins



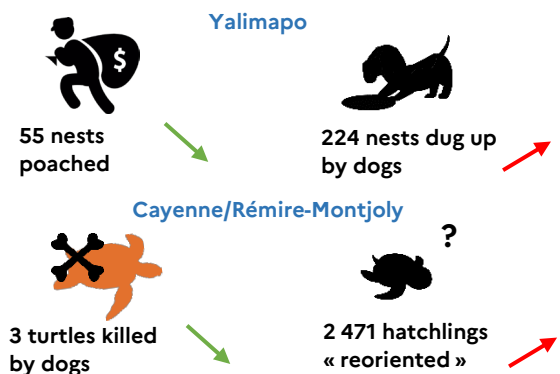
*Evolution in the number of sea turtle clutches between 2009 and 2023 at the 2 main sites in French Guiana: Awala-Yalimapo in the west and Cayenne/Rémire-Montjoly in the east.*

### Key points to remember:

#### CLUTCHES



#### ONSHORE THREATS



#### STRANDINGS



**Bycatch is the main identified cause of strandings (~30%)**

All types of fishing included (IUU fishing, ghost nets...)

(preliminary data)

*(Leatherback / Green / Olive ridley turtle / colored arrow : variation compared with 2022)*

Sea turtles in French Guiana are victims of **multiple threats**. First of all, in the east, despite the efforts of some to reduce light pollution, numerous **disorientations** have been observed this year. A total of 2,471 lost hatchlings were saved by the Kwata association. Still to the east, three **fatal attacks by stray dogs** were recorded on female turtles that had come to lay their eggs on the beach.

The canid problem also persists in the west, where RNA rangers have mobilized to rescue 757 hatchlings whose nests had been dug up by dogs. During this season, many surveillance operations were carried out by RNA rangers with the help of the State - OFB environmental police and gendarmerie - resulting in the arrest of four poachers. A drop in **poaching** was noted, with 2 nests poached in the east and 55 in the west, a 44% reduction on last year's figures. The biggest threat to sea turtles in the west, however, remains bycatch from **foreign IUU fishing**. Finally, the environment is under increasing pressure from **global warming**: in this way, erosion and the particularly high temperatures of this dry season have resulted in a low survival rate of hatchlings, raising concerns for the coming years.

RTMG teams will continue to be present on the beaches next year to monitor these emblematic species.

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