

From One Feeding Ground to Another: Green Turtle Migration Between Brazil and Nicaragua

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A green turtle measuring 88cm in curved carapace length, and 80cm in curved carapace width was tagged in 1994 in the waters of Almofala, in the state of Ceará, off the northeast coast of Brazil. This animal was later captured in March 1998 at Merilin Bar, in the vicinity of Miskitu Cay, off the northeastern Caribbean coast of Nicaragua. Although the route taken by the turtle is not known, the straightline distance between the two sites is approximately 5300 km.

The turtle was captured in Nicaragua by Roberto Menna, a Miskitu Indian from the community of Pahra. Marine turtles are harvested by Miskitu Indians of Caribbean Nicaragua primarily as a source of protein and income (Lagueux 1998). A minimum of 11,000 green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*), 600 loggerhead turtles (*Caretta caretta*), 100 hawksbill turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), and a dozen leatherback turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*) are estimated to be captured and/or harvested in this region each year (Lagueux 1998).

The turtle was originally tagged in Almofala after it was found accidentally caught in one of the *currais*, a traditional wooden fishing weir used from January to July by the local Indians in Almofala. These traps are an important part of the indigenous culture in Almofala. The construction of the weirs includes an important ceremonial component, and building plans are passed down from generation to generation (Seraine 1958). As part of its ongoing work with indigenous fishermen (Marcovaldi 1991; Marcovaldi *et al.* 1998) Projeto TAMAR in Almofala is also planning to investigate the occurrence of turtles incidentally ensnared by nets set for lobster.

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