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TRACKING NESTING HAWKSBILLS “CHEL” AND “GINGER” FROM THE BAY ISLANDS, HONDURAS

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The ability to track animal movements can give vital insights into important aspects of life history. Satellite telemetry technology has been a key to broadening our understanding of the migration patterns of nesting sea turtles. In this study, we fixed Wildlife Computer Spot 5 satellite tags to two nesting hawksbill sea turtles on the Bay Island of Utila, Honduras. One satellite tag was launched August 12, 2012 on a turtle named “Ginger”. Ginger left Utila the following day and set off in a northwest direction, navigating through the islands off the coast of Belize and halting her northward migration about 10 km off the coast, just south of Belize City and approximately 15 km south of the Drowned Cayes. She traveled a straight-line distance of 181 km and covered a total distance of 325 km over 19 days, maintaining an average speed of 17 km/day. The other satellite tag was fixed on a turtle named “Chel” and was launched on July 12, 2012. Chel spent 10 days in the waters off Utila and then also moved northwest toward Belize, hugging the coast of the Yucatan Peninsula, and finally reaching her feeding grounds just south of Cozumel, Mexico. Over a period of 90 days, Chel traveled a straight-line distance of 402 km, with a total distance traveled of 1,060 km. Her average traveling speed was 15 km/day. This turtle has now spent approximately 65 days in the Bahia de la Ascension, a large bay that is bordered on several sides by the Reserva de la Biosfera Sian-Ka’an in the state of Quintana Roo, Mexico. These types of data from hawksbill turtles are particularly lacking for turtles found in the waters of Honduras. Continued transmittance from these and other satellite tagged turtles will provide information that will strengthen conservation efforts for the species both locally and internationally.