

SEA TURTLES, DUGONG, CATFISH AND HUMAN BEINGS: REVIEW OF SEASTAR2000

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Abstract

We launched the Southeast Asia Sea Turtle Associative Research (SEASTAR2000) in 1999 on the request of the Thai government. At the time, the US government had notified the Thai government of a ban on shrimp exports to the USA due to by-catch of sea turtles by shrimp trawlers. Therefore, the research, at first, focused on tracking sea turtles using the Argos satellite system in order to clarify their migratory routes then to develop an implementation plan to avoid the by-catch. The results revealed their migratory paths clearly and showed the necessity of international cooperation among the ASEAN countries because the turtles easily migrated beyond the borders. Based on the successful results of the SEASTAR2000, the Thai government requested us to investigate the migration behavior of the Mekong giant catfish. The Mekong giant catfish is endemic to the Mekong River basin but they are deeply endangered now. We launched the Mekong Giant Catfish Tracking Project (MCTP) in 2002. We performed the MCTP both in the Mekong River and in an artificial reservoir located in Phayao Province, Thailand using ultrasonic biotelemetry. We discovered many interesting findings in the Mekong giant catfish study. The findings will be useful for their utilization for food resources as well as conservation of the giant catfish in the future. Dugongs are the only marine mammals that feed on benthic sea grass and they are also greatly endangered. As with the sea turtles, dugongs are sometimes caught incidentally by fishing gear due to many human activities in the shallow waters where they live and feed. We launched the dugong biological survey in Trang Province, Thailand in 2002. We developed a new instrument (Automatic Underwater Sound Monitoring System for Dugongs, AUSOMS-D) to monitor dugong behavior using acoustic techniques. We must appreciate the need for coexistence between these endangered species and the local people.