REEF CATCHMENTS

High-flying turtle watchers keep track of nesting season

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Reef Catchments staff took to the air recently, carrying out a survey of sandy islands and beaches from the Whitsundays in the north right down to Stanage Bay in the south. The team even went as far east as Bushy Island.

This survey was only possible through assistance and partnerships with the Queensland Turtle Conservation Project, Mackay and District Turtle Watch Association, and Fitzroy Basin Association.

This project is funded by the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment Reef Trust, and delivered through the National Landcare Program Regional Land Partnerships agreement.

The surveys identified both the number and species of nesting turtle tracks that had been made the previous night. Green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) and flatback turtles (*Natator depressus*) were found to be nesting on our beaches. While the green turtle has a global distribution, the flatback turtle only nests in Australia.

The team also recorded the number of old nesting turtle tracks. Nesting hotspots for our region were also uncovered during this survey, an exciting result for turtle conservation.

Reef Catchments project officer Jessica Sabatino said: "The information collected during the survey will be used to prioritise beaches for habitat enhancement and protection. This is important for marine turtles who have numerous threats, including light pollution, coastal development and climate change. Some of the work that will follow this survey includes a reduction in the amount of light pollution on nesting beaches.

"A massive thank you to the people and organisation that made this survey possible, particularly the turtle watch volunteers who waved at the plane during their sunrise beach walks and also provided valuable ground truthing."

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