

**Initial actions towards the conservation of three species of endangered river turtles  
in the Colombian Amazonia.  
Community-based nests monitoring and educational pilot programs**

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**Final Report**

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## Presentation

This pilot program sought to identify, protect and monitor nesting sites of the three river turtle species in a reproductive beach in the vicinity of the Santa Sofia indigenous reserve, in the Colombian Amazonia. Furthermore, it carried out a strong educational campaign in the Nuevo Jardin community of the Reserve, based on conservation appropriation by the young people, awareness-rising through art and ludic activities with the children, and identification and communication of traditional knowledge regarding turtles by elder people.



Adult *Podocnemis unifilis* rescued from a fishing net. Photo: F. Arbeláez

## The environmental education pilot program

The program took place in the Nuevo Jardin community (Tikuna ethnic group) of the Santa Sofia indigenous reserve. It consisted in undertaking a strong educational campaign with the community to support the monitoring program through a series of activities and workshops. It focused on three main aspects:

**1. Awareness-rising of children through play and art.** This included: ludic activities related to turtles (games that simulated nesting, escaping from hunters and predators, races in turtle disguises, etc.); drawing and ceramics seeking to identify characteristics of the different species (shape, color, size) and their ecology (relationship with other animals and plants, nesting, etc.); and finally preparation of a stageplay based on traditional knowledge and turtle conservation and its presentation to the community. The stageplay was filmed and edited to include it in an awareness-rising video. It can be seen following this [link](#).



Awareness-rising activities towards turtle conservation carried out with children, and "Torichiga" stageplay (river turtle story in Tikuna). Photos: Diana T. Gutiérrez and F. Arbeláez.



## 2. Identification and use of traditional knowledge related to turtles by elder people.

Interviews by the young people group and workshops with elder people were carried out, aiming to rescue ancestral memory, myths and legends, and the historical relationship between the community and the turtles. Traditional stories and myths were used as a base for the story of the stageplay.

Grandpas and grandmas gathered to share traditional turtle stories and a tasty *masato* (traditional drink) with children and young people.  
Photo: F. Arbeláez.



**3. Commitment to conservation, appropriation of the program and active participation by a group of young leaders.** We worked very intensively with a group of six young people of the community. They learned to operate audiovisual equipment and were in charge of the interviews and organizing the activities with children and adults. Furthermore, they were wrote the story of the stageplay and participated actively in their preparation, scenography and performance, and are preparing to become future leaders in turtle conservation of the community and of the reserve. They even made their own small documentary to promote an aquaculture project of the community.



The young leaders trained to carry out interviews and to operate audiovisual equipment. Photos: F. Arbeláez



## Socialization activities

The audiovisual material and the drawings of the children were used to edit an awareness-rising video that included the “Torichiga” stageplay and visual memories of the educational program. The video was given to the young people group to present it to the community. Adults and children would gather every night to watch the video over and over. This was an experience that the children, especially those that appeared on the play, are not likely to forget easily. The young people also presented the video in nearby schools, where it was received with great interest by children and teacher, and were interviewed in regional radio and television to promote turtle conservation.



Dissemination activities with neighbor schools: the video of "Torichiga" was shown and the children made colorful signs in Spanish and in Tikuna that invited adults to preserve the turtles.  
Photos: F. Arbeláez

## Follow-up

Based on the experiences learnt during the pilot program and the needs expressed by local communities, a project follow-up was designed and concerted with the communities for 2009 and 2010. The main goal is to conform and give tools and capacity-building to local conservation groups in indigenous communities of Colombia and Peru so they can become leaders in turtle conservation in the area. Furthermore, it aims to expand the awareness-rising campaign to include more communities and schools of the area, using the tools acquired during the pilot program in Nuevo Jardin, such as the awareness-rising video. We also aim to promote more intensively turtle conservation in regional media, such as radio, television and press.

## Future use of the equipment

The audiovisual equipment is now available to be used by researchers of the Fundación BioDiversa Colombia for their current and future projects. FBC carries out biological and applied research on biodiversity conservation and sustainable development in different parts of Colombia. The equipment will also be used for the follow-up of the turtle conservation program.

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