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## **FIRST LEATHERBACK SEA TURTLE IN SOUTHERN COSTA RICA RECEIVES SATELLITE TAG**

*Follow Her Travels on the National Aquarium In Baltimore's Web Site*

Baltimore (July 13, 2004)— The National Aquarium in Baltimore recently provided a satellite tag for a leatherback sea turtle that nested on Gandoca, a remote beach in Costa Rica. The tag was mounted on May 30, 2004 by the Caribbean Conservation Corporation in conjunction with Costa Rican conservation group Asociación ANAI and allows scientists to monitor the movements of this critically endangered animal, named Purruja. The public may also trace her whereabouts by logging onto the Aquarium's Web site at [www.aqua.org/leatherback](http://www.aqua.org/leatherback).

ANAI volunteers have monitored the beaches of Gandoca, Costa Rica since 1985, watching for nesting sea turtles. Purruja has nested twice this year on Gandoca's beaches. Through this satellite monitoring, scientists have learned that she also nested in Panama, out of ANAI's volunteers' sight.

“Sea turtles constantly migrate to different waters in search of new places to feed and mate, returning to the same beaches year after year to nest,” said David Schofield, the Aquarium's manager of ocean health initiatives. “Satellite tags show us exactly where these animals go, and supports our goal of producing stronger regional and international efforts to protect this endangered species.”

Once numerous, all sea turtle species are now sliding toward extinction. The Caribbean adult leatherback population currently hovers around 25,000 individuals, approximately 1% of the 1980 population. Leatherback sea turtles are the world's largest sea turtles, reaching eight feet long and weighing as much as a small car. They are hunted for their meat, shells and eggs.

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“We watch between 400 and 500 turtles, like Purruja, lay eggs each year. After the mothers return to sea, we help ensure the clutches’ safety,” said Didiher Chacón, ANAI’s director of the sea turtle conservation project. “Their population has dropped to the point that each individual counts. Our goal is to help the next generation of leatherbacks thrive.”

The Aquarium’s Marine Animal Rescue Program has responded to six calls about leatherback sea turtles in Maryland waters over the past 12 years. Luckily three of the turtles were disentangled from fishing gear and healthy enough to swim away. Sadly, the others perished.

While this is the first time the National Aquarium in Baltimore and ANAI have collaborated on sea turtle conservation, the two groups have been partners for many years. Over the past dozen years, the Aquarium has collected more than \$380,000 in donations from visitors, which ANAI then uses to purchase rain forest land, protecting it from development.

The National Aquarium in Baltimore, a non-profit organization, is Maryland’s most exciting and popular cultural attraction, as well as one of the region’s leading conservation and education resources, hosting more than 1.6 million visitors per year. The Aquarium’s mission is to connect people with aquatic life in order to create a better world for both. It is dedicated to education and conservation through more than a dozen programs that serve the environment and the community.

ANAI is a Costa Rican non-profit association dedicated to uniting biodiversity conservation and equitable socio-economic development that improves the lives of both current and future generations. ANAI’s work is centered on the Greater Talamanca Biodiversity Hotspot, with a specific focus on the communities of the Caribbean watersheds.

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