Update on the Status of the IOSEA Network Site

(Version: 8 April 2024)

Con Dao National Park

A. Date of submission (DD/MM/YYYY):
The date on which the questionnaire was 27/5/2024 *completed.*

B. Name and address of compiler(s), if not the IOSEA Focal Point

Name and contact information (including affiliation) for the individual(s) who prepared this information.

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C. Country: *The name of the country in which the site is located.*

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D. Name of site: *The name of the site (alternative names should be given in brackets).*

Con Dao National Park
Local name: Vuon quoc gia Con Dao

1. **Have there been changes in the management authority? **
Name, address and contact details of the body responsible for the direct <u>local</u> conservation and management of the site, if different than in original proposal.

There have been no changes.

2. What are the current population numbers and trends for the marine turtle species present at the site?

Please insert population numbers for each species present and the year when the population was estimated, as well as the population trend (e.g. stable, increasing, decreasing, unknown)

- The offshore areas are important as nesting sites for Green Turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) and feeding grounds for Hawksbill Turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*).

- Estimated number of female turtles visiting breeding grounds (data updated in 2023):

+ Green turtles: 755 individuals

+ Hawksbill turtle: Data not available

- Sea turtle population trend: Stable.

3. Have there been any changes in land/sea ownership, protected status, legislation and/or governance framework, which affect the site?

- *Describe any changes to legislation / regulations relevant to the protection / conservation of marine turtles and their habitats at this site, and comment on their effectiveness.*

There have been no changes

- *Mention any changes in nationally relevant protected area status, international conservation designations and, in the case of transboundary sites, bilateral or multilateral conservation measures which pertain to all or part of the site since 2019. If a protected area or reserve has been established (at a national/regional level), give the date of its establishment and size. If only a part of the site is included within a protected area, the area of marine turtle habitat that is protected should be noted.*
New International designations since 2019 may include sites listed under the UNESCO/World Heritage Convention, Man and Biosphere Reserve Network, Ramsar Convention, other site conservation networks, etc. Where appropriate, list the IUCN (1994) protected areas management category(ies) that apply to the site.

- **Establishment Date:** Con Dao National Park, located in Ba Ria-Vung Tau province, was officially established by Prime Ministerial Decision No. 135/QD-TTg on March 31, 1993.
- **Scale:** Con Dao National Park covers an area of 19,883.15 hectares. The Forest Conservation Component encompasses 5,883.15 hectares, divided into three subdivisions:
    1. Strictly Protected Subdivision: 4,614.08 hectares
    2. Ecological Restoration Subdivision: 531.03 hectares
    3. Service-Administrative Subdivision: 738.04 hectares

The Marine Conservation Component, spanning 14,000 hectares, is divided into three subdivisions:

1. Strictly Protected Subdivision: 2,292.1 hectares
2. Ecological Restoration Subdivision: 2,062.2 hectares
3. Service-Administrative Subdivision: 9,645.7 hectares

Additionally, a sea buffer zone has been established, covering an area of 20,500 hectares.

- Participation in international organizations:

+ Regconized as a Wetland of international importance (2,203rd Ramsar Site globally, 6th Ramsar Site in Vietnam, and the first marine Ramsar Site in Vietnam).

+ Member of the "Sea turtle conservation in the Indian Ocean-Southeast Asia region" (IOSEA) network.

+ The waters of Con Dao National Park are one of two Important Marine Mammal Conservation Areas (Important Marine Mammal Areas-IMMAs) in Vietnam.

+ Con Dao National Park was declared an ASEAN Heritage Park in accordance with the ASEAN Declaration on Heritage Parks on December 18, 2003, in Yangon, Myanmar. This designation was approved on 31 October 2022 by the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on the Environment (AMME) via ad referendum.

4. What are currently the most important threats to marine turtles and their habitat at the site?

Describe the human and natural factors negatively affecting the ecological character of the site, both within and in the vicinity of the site. These may include new or changing activities/uses, major development projects etc., which have had, are having, or may have a detrimental effect on the natural ecological character of the site. For example, describe in terms of the percentage of coastline (or other area) modified/affected by a particular threat; for egg collection, describe in terms of number of nests, per species, per year. Mention also data-deficient threats, where a threat is known to be present but is not quantified. Collectively, this information should provide a basis for monitoring of ecological character of the site.

Sea turtle poaching:

Harmful activities against sea turtles are still occuring. Between 2019 and 2023, the Con Dao National Park Ranger force, in coordination with the authorities, arrested 07 individuals violating protection regulations. The seized items, which belong to Rare and endangered species prioritized for protection (storage, purchasing, transportation, etc.) included over 80 kg of meat and organs, 4.5 kg of turtle eggs and 144 green turtle eggs. These violation cases have been transferred to relevant authorities, and criminal proceedings have been initiated).

Pollution:

Marine environmental pollution is currently escalating in severity, with fishing activities being one of the primary causes. These activities lead to discharge of plastic waste, pollutatns from engine vessels, the use of prohibited fishing gears, or use excessive lighting during fishing. Such practices significantly impact the marine ecosystem, particularly affecting sea turtles and other rare species.

Natural Hazards:

Natural threats to sea turtles include several factors. Female turtles sometimes engage in: duplicate egg-laying, where a subsequent turtle dig up the previous nest, thereby damaging the eggs. Additionally, various animal prey on turtle eggs. The erosion of nesting sand beaches, exacerbated by the impact of waves, wind, currents and tides, is also intensifying due to climate change.

Illegal fishing in the area: coral damage and bycatch

Sea turtles are often unintentionally entangled in fishing nets and collide with ships. These incidents occur due to the ingestion of debris along their migratory routes, the reduction or loss of foraging areas, and the pollution or degradation of ecosystems. Environmental pollution, caused by marine debris, discarded or lost fishing nets, and other fishing gears, results in sea turtles becoming entangled and dying. Furthermore, this pollution contaminates their breeding grounds, directly threatening the survival of sea turtles

Habitat destruction/modification

Currently, the sea turtle breeding grounds within the area managed by Con Dao National Park are experiencing significant erosion and landslide. Sand beaches in the northwest of the main island, including Dat Tham, Bai Bang, Dam Trau Nho, Ong Cuong, Ong Cau,... as well as the sand beaches of small islands such as Hon Tre Lon, Hon Tai, Bay Canh, Hon Cau,... are gradually losing their breeding habitat for sea turtles.

Socio economic factors

Tourism activities: marine transportation vehicles have occasionally collided with sea turtles, resulting in injury and death. There have been 04 documented cases of sea turtles fatalities caused by collisions with canoes engaged in tourist transport

Con Dao is experiencing significant development, characterized by an increasing number of immigrants, a growing population of fishermen engages in marine capture fisheries, and a rising influx of tourists. This expansion poses substantial pressure and potential negative impacts on the effectiveness of natural resource conservation and marine biodiversity preservation.

5. **New conservation and management interventions taken since 2019 and measures planned for near future**

Describe conservation and management interventions taken at the site to address threats since 2019. Any application of coastal and marine spatial planning, or integrated coastal/marine zone management planning, involving or affecting the site should be noted.

Describe any other new conservation measures taken at the site, such as restrictions on development, management practices beneficial to wildlife, closures of fishing, etc. (Note that information on any monitoring schemes and survey methods should be given under point 19, below.)

Where applicable, describe public outreach and communication activities. In addition, if applicable, describe any new developments in the involvement of local communities and indigenous people in the participatory management of the site, including co-management activities, surveillance and enforcement, and performance evaluation since 2019.

- Management, protection and rescue of sea turtles

+ Protection patrol: Sea turtle nesting grounds on the island are patrolled by Ranger Stations during the breeding season. During patrol, if sea turtles are discovered nesting on the beach, traces are removed, turtle nests are relocated to the hatchery, and information on the number of sea turtle traces is recorded. Species identification and egg parameter collection are also conducted.

+ Create favorable breeding grounds for female turtles to nest: The Con Dao National Park Management Board has issued Sea Turtle Conservation Regulations, which include several measures to minimize disturbances at breeding grounds during the breeding season. These measures include reducing noise and lighting at night, prohibiting anchoring and netting near spawning grounds, leveling mounds and sand pits, and cutting tree branches and roots to facilitate easy access for female turtles. Obstacles on sandy beaches, such as tree branches and floating debris, are also cleared to provide a suitable environment for nesting.

+ Relocation and rescue: At night, during high tide, forest rangers record information about mother turtles laying eggs. Once the mother turtles have laid their eggs, the nests are relocated to the incubation lake. Upon hatching, the baby turtles are immediately collected and released back into the sea..

- Educational propaganda work

The Con Dao National Park Management Board has incorporated sea turtle protection awareness campaigns into its broader initiatives for biodiversity conservation and environmental education. These efforts are targeted at various groups, including students, fishermen, armed forces personnel, and tourists, to enhance awareness and promote the protection of the natural environment

- Coordination with non-governmental organizations for sea turtle conservation programs:

+ The World Conservation Union (IUCN) VietnamIUCN Vietnam conducts an annual volunteer program dedicated to sea turtle conservation. From 2016 to 2023, a total of 394 volunteers participated, contributing 2,920 man-days. They collaborated with Forest

Rangers to monitor and safely relocate 3,205 egg nests containing 395,485 eggs, and tracked and released 115,077 hatchlings into the sea.

+ The Natural Education Center (ENV) ENV organizes awareness-raising exhibitions on sea turtle protection, trains and recruits volunteers for sea turtle conservation, and posts hoardings and posters advocating for sea turtle protection. They also implement the "Sea Turtle Safety Zone" program at 55 business establishments in the area .

+ Wildlife Protection Organization (WAR) WAR prints and distributes educational materials on marine conservation for secondary school students in Con Dao district..

- Enhancing community participation in sea turtle conservation:

The Con Dao National Park Management Board actively encourages and promotes community involvement in sea turtle protection and conservation efforts through various initiatives:

1. **Career Transition Support:** Facilitating and supporting local residents in transitioning from destructive fishing practices to sustainable alternatives. This includes organizing eco-tours and transporting tourists to observe sea turtles laying eggs, a distinctive tourism experience in Con Dao.
2. **Coordinated Patrols:** Collaborating with the armed forces and local authorities in Con Dao district to conduct patrols, inspections, and enforcement actions against violations related to sea turtles.
3. **Collaborative Conservation Efforts:** Partnering with Con Dao Resort Co., Ltd. to implement a coordinated plan aimed at restoring and preserving sea turtle breeding grounds at Dat Doc, Con Dao district for the periods 2018-2020 and 2021-2025. This initiative has been recognized by the Vietnam Association of National Parks and Protected Areas as a model for "Socialization in Sea Turtle Conservation and Rescue."

Additionally, the Management Board has collaborated with the Management Board of Cu Lao Cham Marine Protected Area in Quang Nam province to undertake research focused on the conservation and restoration of sea turtle populations in Cu Lao Cham.

6. Current / proposed scientific research and monitoring since 201

Name current and/or proposed scientific research projects and their start and end dates, relating to marine turtles and their habitats. Please describe monitoring activities (e.g., tagging, satellite tracking, genetic sampling, nesting and foraging ground surveys, ongoing beach monitoring, etc.). Cite relevant published papers in support of the submission.

- Project implementation: "Relocating and rescuing eggs and hatchlings to restore sea turtle populations in Con Dao, addressing the impact of rising temperatures, high tides, and sea level rises due to climate change during the period 2017 - 2020".

- Plan implementation: Executing the plan to restore and preserve sea turtle breeding grounds at Dat Doc, Con Dao district, for the periods 2018 - 2020 and 2021 - 2025.

- Collaboration with IUCN: Coordinating with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to implement the Sea Turtle Conservation Volunteer Program at Con Dao National Park for the periods 2016 - 2020 and 2021 - 2025.

7. **Briefly describe current financial as well as capacity-building needs**

The expenditure for sea turtle conservation efforts from from 2019 to 2023 is approximately: 5,566,224,000 VND

8. **References since 2014**

List any new references relevant to marine turtle records and to the site, including management plans, major scientific reports, scientific articles and bibliographies. When a large body of published material on the site is available, only the most important references need be cited, with priority being given to recent literature containing extensive bibliographies. Reprints or copies of the most important literature should be appended whenever possible. Provide website addresses of references where available.

- Report on Sea Turtle Conservation Results (2019 - 2023);
- Report on the Volunteer Program for Turtle Conservation at Con Dao National Park (2016 - 2020), including updates for 2021 and 2023;
- Explanation of the Sustainable Forest Management Plan for Con Dao National Park (up to 2030).

9. **Please describe how the official designation as an IOSEA Network Site supports conservation efforts. Please also suggest how benefits of inclusion in the Network could be maximized.**

- Propose a project for the research and conservation of sea turtles to facilitate connection and experience sharing among Southeast Asian countries, including Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia..

- Conduct research and implement technical and technological solutions to expand sea turtle breeding grounds, prevent erosion, and preserve biodiversity in Con Dao.