



Sea turtles' conservation in Uruguay the power of working together for the future

by Blandine Thommerel

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Report 1

Objective 1: What has happened (how changes & why)?

Sea turtles are such incredible species which migrate thousand kilometres around the world to feed, grow, reproduce and lay eggs on the beaches. They are the living representatives of a reptiles that has existed and travelled on Earth for the last 100 million years, they have a fundamental role in the health of marine ecosystems. But as many species today, sea turtles are endangered. Threats are numerous on them: plastic pollution, human activities, illegal exploitation, habitat loss or bycatch. One of the main threats in Uruguay, for sea turtles, is bycatch. When fishing occurs, and especially methods such as use of trawlers, pelagic longlining, driftnetting, turtles who are feeding in the water may be caught in the net. Stuck there, they may die from asphyxia.

In 1999, thanks to their own personal experiences with sea turtles in other countries, 11 young and passionate students in biology decided to return in their country and continue the studies about sea turtles. So, they created Karumbé, meaning “turtles” in Guaraní, a non-governmental organisation.

Before Karumbé, people in Uruguay did not know they were sea turtles in their waters. So, the founders had to learn everything by themselves and look for information etc. One of them, Andrés Estrades, realizes quickly that species conservation did not only limit to working with wild nature but more importantly humans and society. Conservation has to be multidisciplinary and that has been a very important motto in Karumbé since the beginning. That’s why, today and for 25 years, Andrés works with fishermen and coastal communities to help the species. They are the “people of the sea”, they are the first to interact with sea turtles. And, if 30 years ago, fishermen used to eat sea turtles they caught, today, thanks to Karumbé, minds have changed. They want to protect them.

The organization has three areas of action: scientific research, rehabilitation, and education. Educating people, children, and fishermen about how to act and react face to sea turtles in danger is one of the fundamental works for species conservation.

So, working together, with educators, biologists, veterinarians and coastal communities is important and necessary. Without this sharing of experiences and knowledge, that would be complicated. Karumbé founders have understood very well that working together without barriers of gender, nationalities or whatever, is the best way to construct and protect our future and especially sea turtles.



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