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Turtle Nesting Threatened by Logging Practices in Gabon, Smithsonian Warns

Endangered sea turtles are victims of sloppy logging practices in the west central African country Gabon, according to a study led by William Laurance, staff scientist at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute. The study will be published online in the journal *Oryx* later this month.

Sea turtle nesting attempts are impeded by lost or abandoned logs that accumulate along the country's coastal beaches. Logs are floated downriver from forests to coastal lumberyards in the Gabonese Republic, but some float out to sea and then wash ashore, where they form large tangles.

In an aerial survey, Laurance's team—co-coordinated by J. Michael Fay of the Wildlife Conservation Society—counted more than 11,000 logs along Gabon's beaches. In the most important area for turtle nesting, Pongara Beach, more than one-third of the beach was blocked by logs. In some places, scientists found up to 247 logs per kilometer of beach.

"It's really sad to see what the logs are doing to the turtles," Laurance said. "Sea turtles move very slowly on land. When a log blocks their path, sometimes they just give up and return to the sea. In other cases they lay their eggs too close to the waterline, where the eggs are killed by seawater. Turtles also become entangled among the logs and die."

The authors estimated that 8 to 14 percent of all turtle nesting attempts are thwarted by logs, sometimes with fatal results for the female. Most of the turtles nesting in this area are leatherback turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*), a critically endangered species according to the IUCN Red Data Book.

"Survival of the leatherback turtle is threatened by fishing, environmental degradation and predation. It's really unfortunate that logging is a threat as well, because plans are afoot to dramatically increase the logging of African rainforests," said Laurance.

The study authors include scientists and staff from the Smithsonian Institution, the Wildlife Conservation Society in Gabon and Adventures Sans Frontiers in Gabon.

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The Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, headquartered in Panama City, Panama, is a unit of the Smithsonian Institution. The institute furthers the understanding of tropical nature and its importance to human welfare, trains students to conduct research in the tropics and promotes conservation by increasing public awareness of the beauty and importance of tropical ecosystems. www.stri.org

Laurance, WF (2008) Does Rainforest Logging Threaten Marine Turtles? *Oryx* 42(2), 1-6 doi: 10.1017/S0030605308006625