



## EXPEDITION DIARY Musandam 2010

By Matthias Hammer & Wren McLean

21 October

Hello everyone and welcome to the first diary entry for Biosphere Expeditions' first ever Western Australia turtle expedition. My name is Dr. Matthias Hammer, founder & Executive Director of Biosphere Expeditions, and I will also be your expedition leader on slot 1 of this project, training Wren McLean, who will take over from me for slot 2. You will also meet Glenn McFarlane, our expedition scientist, and Tony, his sidekick ;)

It's a pretty early entry for the diary, because I am about to leave for Australia tomorrow, spending a week in Melbourne & Sydney, going to the office in Melbourne, having meetings and doing some media work, before hitting Broome about a week ahead of slot 1 to get everything prepared.

I'll write once or twice from Australia to tell you how preparations are going, but for now just a quick message that my mobile phone number during the expedition will be +61 (437) 389363. Remember that this is for emergency purposes only (such as being late for assembly, for example).

I'll see you all at 08.00 at the Mercure Inn Continental Hotel in Broome in due course!

Best wishes

Matthias

P.S. This diary is now also on [www.biosphere-expeditions.org/diaries](http://www.biosphere-expeditions.org/diaries) and excerpts of it are also on [www.facebook.com/pages/Biosphere-Expeditions/132594724471](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Biosphere-Expeditions/132594724471), so please feel free to pass this on to your families & friends for updates on what we are up to.

31 October

I've spent a week in Melbourne seeing our Biosphere office staff, giving press interviews (a couple of which are on our Facebook site [www.facebook.com/pages/Biosphere-Expeditions/132594724471](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Biosphere-Expeditions/132594724471)), attending our drinks reception in St Kilda, etc. Yesterday I arrived at Broome and it's hot (35 C) and humid with the temperatures set to go one way only - up ;) I'll spend the next week meeting local partners, buying equipment and setting up, ready for the arrival of slot 1 on 8 November. The view from just outside the assembly point alone is pretty impressive, so not a bad place to be for the next few days. There's a video up on Facebook too.

3 November

We're almost ready for you here in Broome. Most of the shopping done and only one more parcel to arrive, as well as Glenn, the scientist. Talking about shopping, if you are worrying about things on your dossier kit list such as headlamps with a red filter, etc., then worry no more as <http://www.kimberleycamping.com.au/> has everything you may want, including those headlamps with the red filter. They are even open on Sundays from 09:00 to 13:00, so you can do your last minute shopping there.

Otherwise another hard Biosphere Expeditions day with a visit to Cable Beach (see <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Biosphere-Expeditions/132594724471>).

See you soon

Matthias

7 November

The whole staff team has now arrived at Eco Beach and we're getting ready for the arrival of the first team. Tony & Glenn had their tent strewn with tags, tapes, bamboo poles, markers, backpacks, etc. and Wren & I set up with a computer, printer & lots of paperwork. Skies are iridescent blue, Eco Beach is a beautiful base, it's hot and humid, but there was a good breeze around blowing away the sand flies ;) Long may it last!

8 November

Slot 1 has arrived safely and all were impressed with the research site and the base. No wonder - it's such a beautiful place in picture book surroundings. The first day was packed with briefings on safety, how to restrain, measure, handle, sample, count, spot, and anything else you can think of, turtles. The first beach patrol just headed out into the dark of the night and we'll be on shifts through the night, because darkness and high tides is what the turtles like when coming onto the beach to nest. Wish us luck and more soon.

10 November

We're in the groove now and things are running smoothly. We now have three patrol groups doing shifts on the beach during the night and early morning and two of those groups have come across and handled turtles. The third group have been unlucky so far, but their time will come! Unusually we've also had a couple of turtles come up on the beach to nest during the heat of the day, which are cloudless with blue skies and temperatures in the high 30s centigrade. Thankfully there's usually a breeze about.

12 November

After a few slow nights on the beach, and just as half our team departed for an afternoon trip to a neighboring Aboriginal community art centre, our first untagged turtle emerged in broad daylight, directly opposite base and proceeded to nest!

Luckily one of our patrol teams was on the case and were able to observe and process the turtle as well as keep other inexperienced onlookers from disturbing her. A total of 47 eggs were laid and we now have another gal added to our database of Eco Beach Flatbacks. Sensibly she chose to nest the shade of one of the sun shelters provided for guests on the beach.

We have been most surprised at the amount of daytime nesting behavior which is not what we would have predicted. As the 'Data Deficient' classification for Australian flatback turtles suggests we still have a lot to learn about these ancient creatures.

Have a look at the Facebook entry with a patrol member counting eggs - <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Biosphere-Expeditions/132594724471>.

17 November

After a couple of quiet nights on the beach, the pressure was on to locate a turtle to deploy our satellite transmitter.

Heading back to catch dinner before patrols started, we spotted the all important turtle of the night, Lucy-Jack sniffing around for her nesting site. Relieved to have the turtle we needed for the job, we radioed back to base from further up the beach whilst some of us kept an eye on her. Luckily the equipment and crew we needed were ready to rock and we didn't need to restrain her long before they were on site.

She had lost one tag over the last couple of years since we had seen her last, so she needed some processing before fitting her new harness with satellite transmitter attached. She remained calm and the whole process was completed in 15 min or so. Lots of happy feelings and high fives followed as we saw her off into the sea. The latest update is that she has travelled around 9 km in the Eco Beach Bay.

18 November

Patrol 1 was leaving to drive to Jack's Creek and came across its first turtle in the golden light of sunset. She was digging a body pit on the edge of the dunes. The patrol spent some time watching her sandblasting antics, noted she was tagged and took some beautiful photos. Then soon after, encountered their second turtle emerging from the surf in the twilight. They stopped the car and observed her for a while then, deeming by her behavior that she would be there for some time, decided to put up their tents at our campsite only 200 m or so before coming back to process her.

One of us had her head strategically positioned near her rear end ready for an egg count as she neared the end of her egg chambering. For mysterious turtle reasons, she then stopped digging and started filling it in again.

She proceeded to dig two more body pits and each time filled it back in. By that time the group had stayed with her for 2 hours and the patrol leader called the decision to move on to patrol the rest of the beach. The group tagged and processed her and interestingly this did not perturb her from continuing her nesting attempts and she was still faffing around in the dunes trying to find a suitable spot an hour later when the patrol returned to camp.

22 November

The early high tides and full moon this week gave us some fortunate chances to view and photograph turtles in the light. We had to be extra cautious not to disturb nesting turtles under the bright moonlight. All team members had intimate and memorable moments with our ancient turtle friends and most of them witnessed the nesting process. Most of the turtles we encountered have been re-migrants, meaning they have already been tagged whilst nesting over the previous two years of the project.

Our calf muscles were feeling pretty buff this morning as team 2 calculated the many km we have walked up and down Eco Beach. Good vibes all round as team 2 waved goodbye this morning, thanks so much for being so much fun. And thank you everyone for making this expedition a success! Safe travels home and please stay in touch and don't forget to share your pictures via [www.biosphere-expeditions.org/pictureshare](http://www.biosphere-expeditions.org/pictureshare).