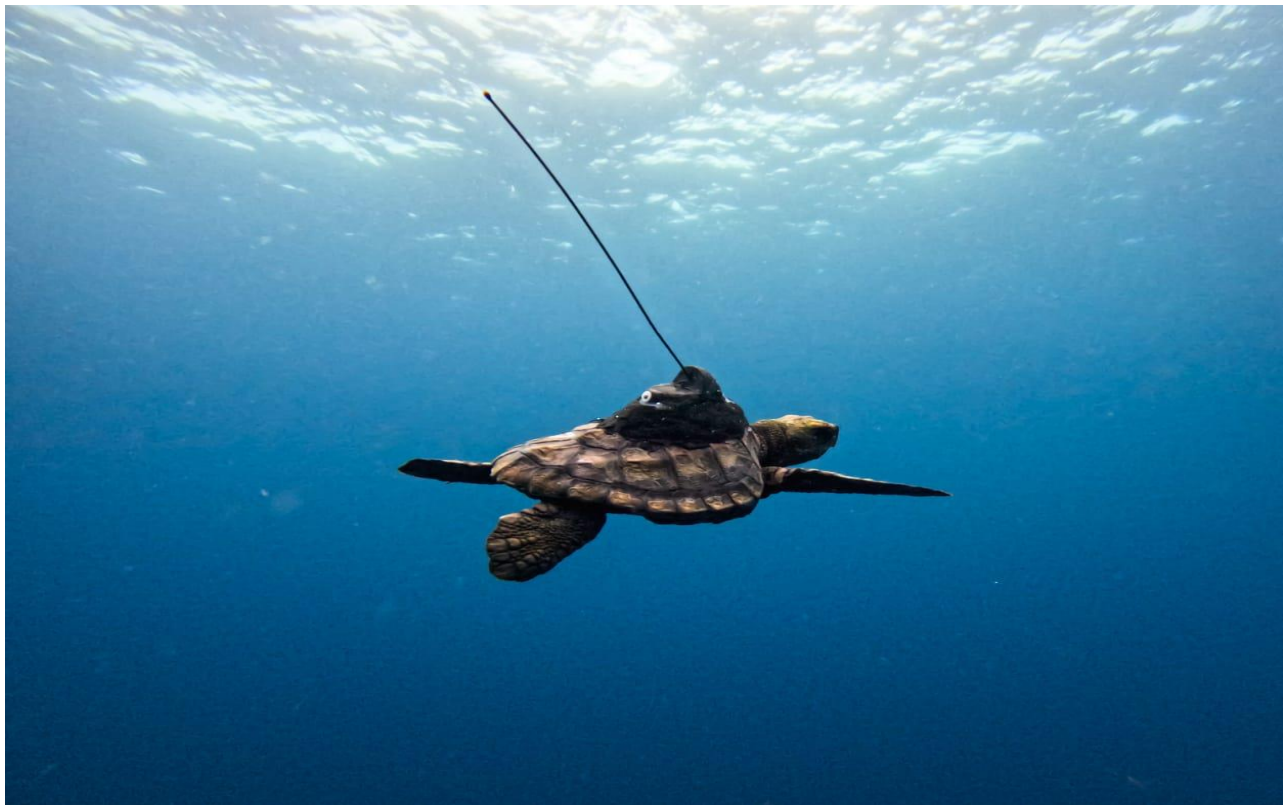


02 December 2024

CONSERVATION WITHOUT BORDERS- TURTLES FIND A NEW HOME



One of the new juveniles released at Sodwana Bay sporting a tracker

Turtle season is upon us at iSimangaliso Wetland Park, and Turtle tours have commenced. These tours are one of the many breath-taking experiences which attracts tourists from all over the world to this World Heritage Site. Turtle Tours not only immerse you in breathtaking scenery, but they also give tourists a chance to learn about vital conservation efforts happening within the Park, while engaging with the turtles. Dedicated conservation work is being done to ensure that this experience is preserved and is passed from generation to generation.

iSimangaliso recently partnered with multiple entities and NGOs including Two Oceans Aquarium Foundation, in an effort to reintroduce rescued sea turtles back into their native habitat along the Sodwana Bay shores. There was great excitement around the release of Bokkie, a green sea turtle, alongside Luna, and 12 Loggerhead hatchlings. Bokkie is an amputee who spent a year in rehabilitation after being discovered by the Turtle Rescue Network on Struisbaai where she was stranded. Over 800 grams of barnacles were painstakingly removed from her bottom shell as well as 47 pieces of plastic, were extracted by the Two Oceans Turtle Conservation team, from her gut system.

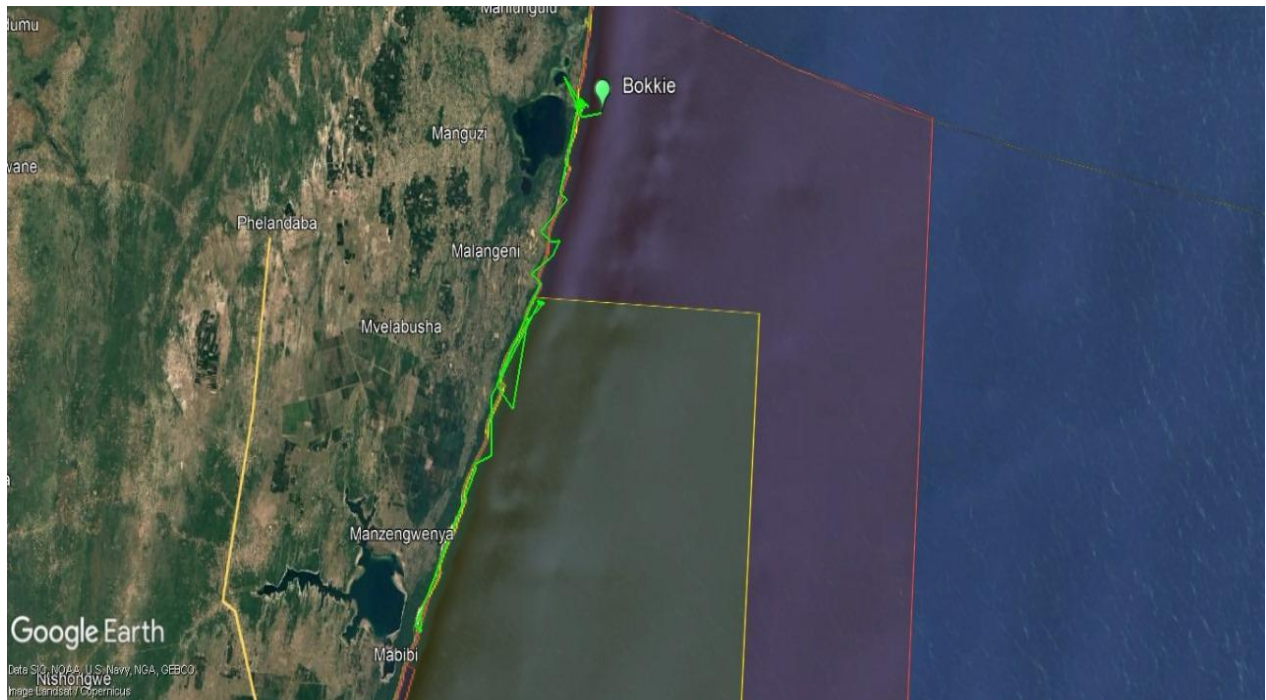


From left to right, representatives from SAAMBR, Two Oceans, iSimangaliso and Upwell

On the 21st of October 2024, iSimangaliso's Ecologist Dr Riaan Cedras, was present to welcome the team from Two Oceans, SAAMBR, Upwell and Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, at Sodwana Bay. With turtles in tow, it was all hands-on deck ensuring the safe unloading of the 14 turtles that were set to be released, while paying careful attention to Bokkie and her three flippers. All of the turtles have satellite tags, and according to the tracking data, after her release, Bokkie started heading north towards Kosi Bay on the Northern section of iSimangaliso Wetland Park where she seems to be enjoying the warm waters of the Indian ocean.

iSimangaliso's Marine Protected Area provides shallow, coastal waters, and estuaries. The Park is also home to the RAMSAR site known as the Coral Reef and Turtle Beaches of Tongaland. It has been a little more than a month since the release of these wonderful creatures, and according to tracking data, they are blissfully exploring all that

the Indian ocean has to offer with only a few making their way down south to the Atlantic ocean.



A visual of Bokkies journey since her release on the 21st of October 2024

Sea turtles maintain the health of the world's oceans, as they fulfill vital functions in ocean ecosystems. Sea turtles maintain productive coral reef ecosystems and transport essential nutrients from the ocean to beaches and coastal dunes. However, in the open ocean these creatures and their habitats are under threat due to fishing pressures, pollution and climate change. The warm waters of the Indian ocean that borders iSimangaliso, are a refuge for several turtle species, including the endangered Leatherback turtles and the threatened Loggerhead turtles.

iSimangaliso has an integrated park made up of over 1 328 000 hectares that stretches over 220 kilometers along the coast of the Indian ocean up to the Mozambican border. The Marine Protected Area makes up a significant portion of the Park and annually these turtles travel north each season to nest in the Park. Female turtles always return to their place of birth to lay their eggs, which is why it was imperative for Bokkie to be returned to where her life most likely began.

It comes as no surprise to the Park Authority that time and time again, iSimangaliso Wetland Park, is entrusted with continuing the conservation efforts initiated by other non-profit organisations. As it stands, there are six factors that make iSimangaliso a sanctuary for turtle conservation. Namely;

1. Enforcing Legislation

iSimangaliso has enforced legislation that bans the harvesting of adult turtles and the collection of their eggs.

2. Monitoring Nesting

iSimangaliso monitors turtle nesting activity each year to ensure hatchlings make it safely back to the ocean.

3. Creating a Marine Protected Area

iSimangaliso Wetland Park has been declared a Marine Protected Area (MPA), to protect nesting turtles and hatchlings from predators.

4. Enforcing Legislation with Patrol

iSimangaliso has field rangers who patrol the coast daily, nightly, and when needed.

5. Offering Turtle Tours

iSimangaliso offers turtle tours, including nesting tours.

6. Hosting Turtle Release Events

iSimangaliso has released juvenile turtles into the Park.

For iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority, conservation without borders, means holding the Park to the highest standards, to inspire change across ecosystems, no matter where they are located in the world. "Such collaborations, bring about a sense of pride for the Park, as it serves as a reminder, that the work we do, has an impact that goes beyond the borders of iSimangaliso," said the CEO of iSimangaliso Wetland Park, Mr Bukhosini. It is the highest order of achievement, for the Park to be recognised as a global symbol of unity in conservation, with the main focus of protecting the Park's outstanding World Heritage values for current and future generations, while optimising tourism and related development in the Park.

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Statement issued by iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority

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