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Tinglar nests in Puerto Rico's northeastern beaches [1]

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By Carlos E. Diez / Special for El Nuevo Día endi.com [2] Tinglar (Dermochelys coriacea), is one of the species of marine turtle that nest in our beaches. It can measure up to three meters and weight up to one ton, making it one of te biggest turtles of the world. This reptile has a shell formed of very fine and small bony plaques, covered by tissue similar to skin (hence it's common name "leatherback"). Also it has long and strong front fins that together with the hydrodynamic design of its shell allow it to swim long distances. The tinglar inhabits deep ocean waters and frequents tempered waters, like the Arctic or the north Atlantic. It must return to tropical waters for its reproduction. It feeds off big jellyfish and must dive up to 1.000 meters in search of food. The tinglar grows fast and reaches sexual maturity at 10 years, which is quick if compared with other species of marine turtles, that can take up to 30 years. The most important beaches for the tinglar's nesting are in Guyana and Surinam. There are also nesting colonies in the Pacific of Mexico, Costa Rica and Asia, but their numbers have decreased considerably. In the Caribbean, the beaches of Trinidad and Tobago lodge around 3,000 nests, followed by Puerto Rico and adjacent islands, that exceed the 700 nests in the high season. Although there is nesting practically in all Puerto Rico, the most important beaches are in the northeast, Fajardo, Culebra and Vieques. Molecular studies have determined that the nesting females of Culebra, Fajardo and the Virgin Islands are part of a same population and proof of this is that turtles that have been marked in Culebra have been soon seen nesting in beaches in St. Croix, and vice versa. Therefore, this elevates the level of importance of the Puerto Rican beaches, since they have the responsibility of being scatterers of this species for the rest of the Caribbean. Reports of animals captured in the coasts of New Scotland, Canada have found tinglares marked in Culebra and Fajardo. Other nesting studies also have demonstrated that tinglares of Fajardo and/or Culebra migrate toward tempered waters of the north Atlantic. In spite of the increase in nests detected in

Luquillo/Fajardo, in the Island of Culebra has been the opposite, since the numbers of nests have decreased in the last two years. Still it is very premature to reach conclusions on this decrease. Therefore, it is important to continue monitoring the nesting populations of leatherback turtle to be able to determine its condition and to take measures conservation and handling. In Puerto Rico, the monitoring projects - known as Tinglar Project- are sponsored by the Department of Natural Resources, the US Wildlife and Fishing Service and its collaborators, among them the company GULF (Caribbean Petroleum), Sea-Grant-UPR and Chelonia Inc. The conservation of the tinglar turtle in the Island and therefore in the Caribbean is everybody's task. The constant threat to our coasts because of improperly planned tourist and urban development together with pollution of our beaches and waters is an obstacle that these marine giants have to overcome to perpetuate their species; without counting the dangers in the open sea (main cause of death). It is for that reason that the citizens of Puerto Rico must participate actively in the protection of these species, supporting critical designations of habitat and natural reserves and avoiding the light and trash contamination of our coasts.

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