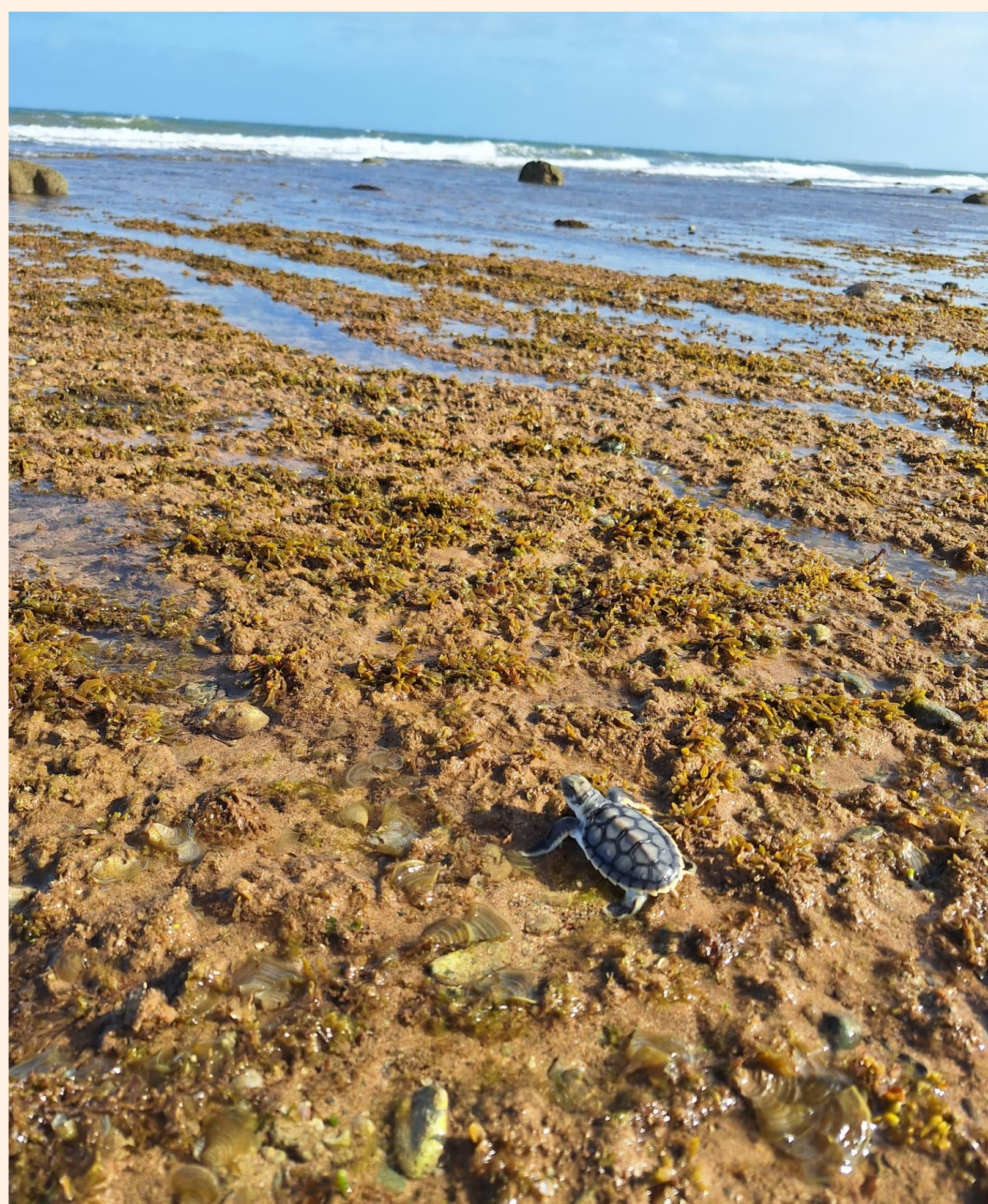


West Pilbara Turtle Program



PROGRAM SUMMARY 2023-24

Background



Flatback hatchling making the water and Turner family watching a hatchling, family monitoring day 2024



Female flatback returning to water after nesting at Cleaverville

A brief history of the program

- The West Pilbara Turtle Program (WPTP) is a partnership between Rio Tinto and Parks and Wildlife Service (P&WS) of the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA)
- It brings together industry, government and the community to monitor, raise awareness and protect marine turtles across the Pilbara
- WPTP has been operating for 21 years, with first data collected for a pilot project in December 2002
- The partnership between Rio Tinto and P&WS has been in place since 2005, 18 years
- Over 750 people have signed up as volunteers, since 2005
- 30-50 volunteers actively conduct beach monitoring each year
- In 2022, Rio Tinto renewed the funding agreement for the program until 2025 continuing long-term data collection at Bells Beach and education of the community about turtle conservation.

Monitoring methodology 2023-24

- Monitoring methodology is based on methodology used for Ningaloo Turtle Program and Care for Hedland Turtle Program
- This year, Bells Beach, Boat Beach and Yacht Club Beach (Wickham) and Cleaverville were monitored over the following dates to gain a broader insight into turtle activity in the region:
 - 7 – 25 November 2023
 - 26 November – 19 December 2023
 - 2 – 16 January 2024
- Data were collected digitally using the ODK collect app
- The yearly estimates of nest numbers and total tracks have been derived from a model developed by A. Whiting in 2018 using data collected from the three sampling periods above.

The West Pilbara Turtle Program acknowledges the traditional owners, the Ngarluma people, of the land and sea country where we work and pay our respects to Ngarluma elders past, present and emerging.

For more information contact the WPTP Coordinator. Phone: 9182 2031. Email: wptp@dbca.wa.gov.au

West Pilbara Turtle Program



PROGRAM SUMMARY 2023-24

Our findings – monitoring data

Monitoring effort

- This year, there were 170 volunteer days covering four beaches.

Species identified

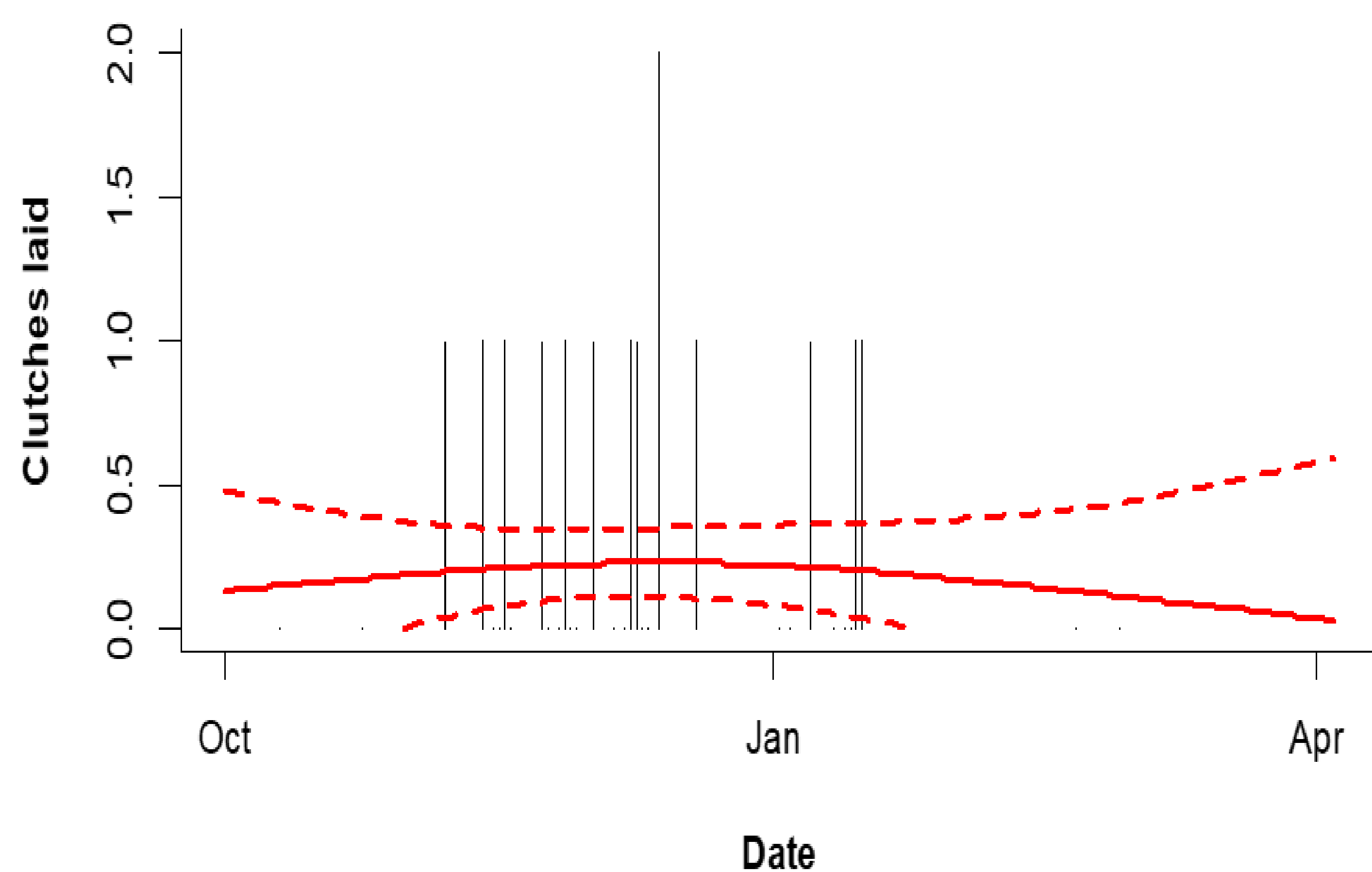
- All tracks and nests were identified as belonging to flatback (*Natator depressus*) turtles.

Predation/disturbance 2023-24

- At Bells Beach and Yacht Club Beach there was one cat and one dog track recorded.
- At Boat Beach there was a moderate level of disturbance recorded with 22 days showing vehicle activity. Three dog and one cat disturbances were recorded.
- At Cleaverville vehicle activity was recorded on 34 of the 57 days monitored along with four dog tracks and one cat track.
- The reporting of vehicle disturbance is certainly being under reported at Boat Beach in our monitoring.
- We'll continue to educate the public about the issue of beach driving in 2023-24.
- Predator trapping was undertaken by Rio Tinto at Bells Beach in August and November 2023.

Number of monitoring days and nests recorded at each monitoring beach, 2023-24.

Site	Days monitored	Nests
Bells and Yacht Club beaches combined	57	276
Boat Beach	57	14
Cleaverville	56	44

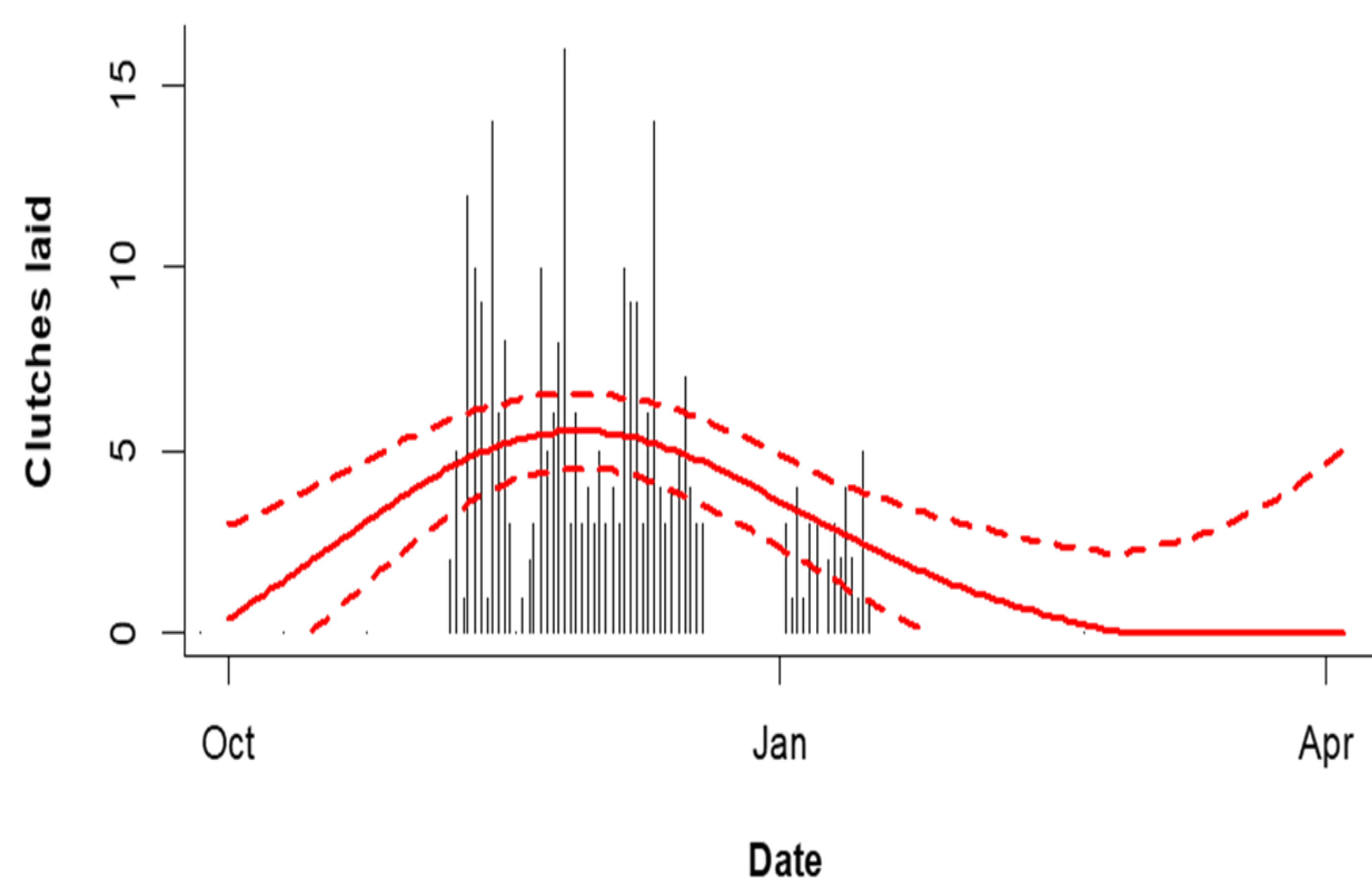


Boat Beach 2023-24

- Actual count: **14 nests over 57 days**
- Model prediction: **31 nests for season (error range: 6-75)**
- Black vertical bars are actual counts, red lines show model with upper and lower limits.

Bells Beach 2023-24

- Actual count: **271 nests over 57 days**
- Model prediction: **452 nests for season (error range: 278-802)**
- Black vertical bars are actual counts, red lines show model with upper and lower limits.



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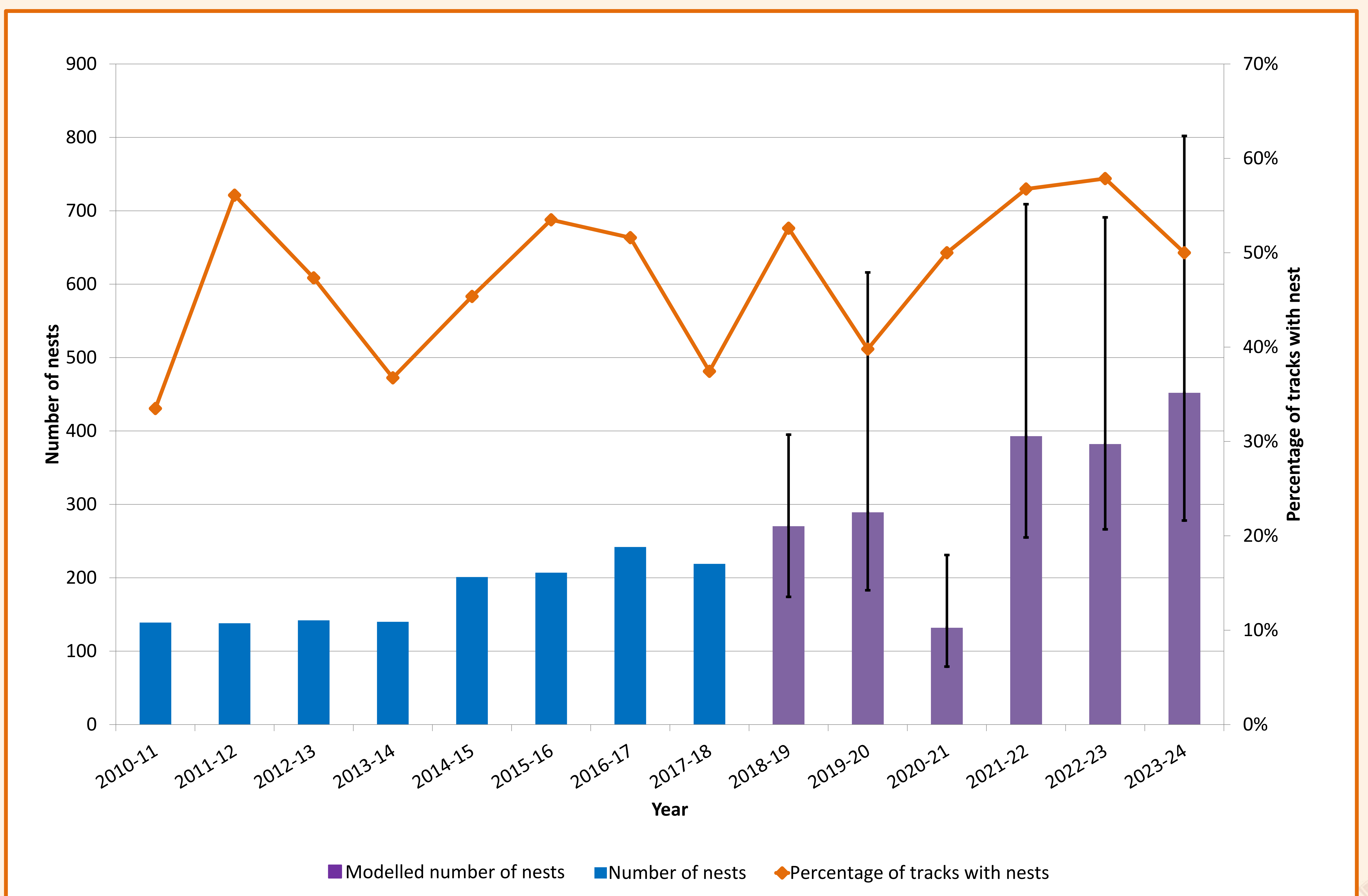
West Pilbara Turtle Program



PROGRAM SUMMARY 2023-24

Our findings – long term nesting trends

- Overall, the number of nests (modelled) for 2023-24 was the highest on record (see figure below) with 452 nests estimated.
- Over the same date ranges, we recorded 271 nests this year (2023-24) compared with 265 last year (2022-23).
- Nest success (shown by orange line) was similar to last year. Nest success is the percentage of all tracks that had a successful nest.
- Overall, it was another strong nesting season at Bells Beach.



Note: Error bars for 2023-24 show the error range of the model used to predict 452 nests for the season at Bells Beach.

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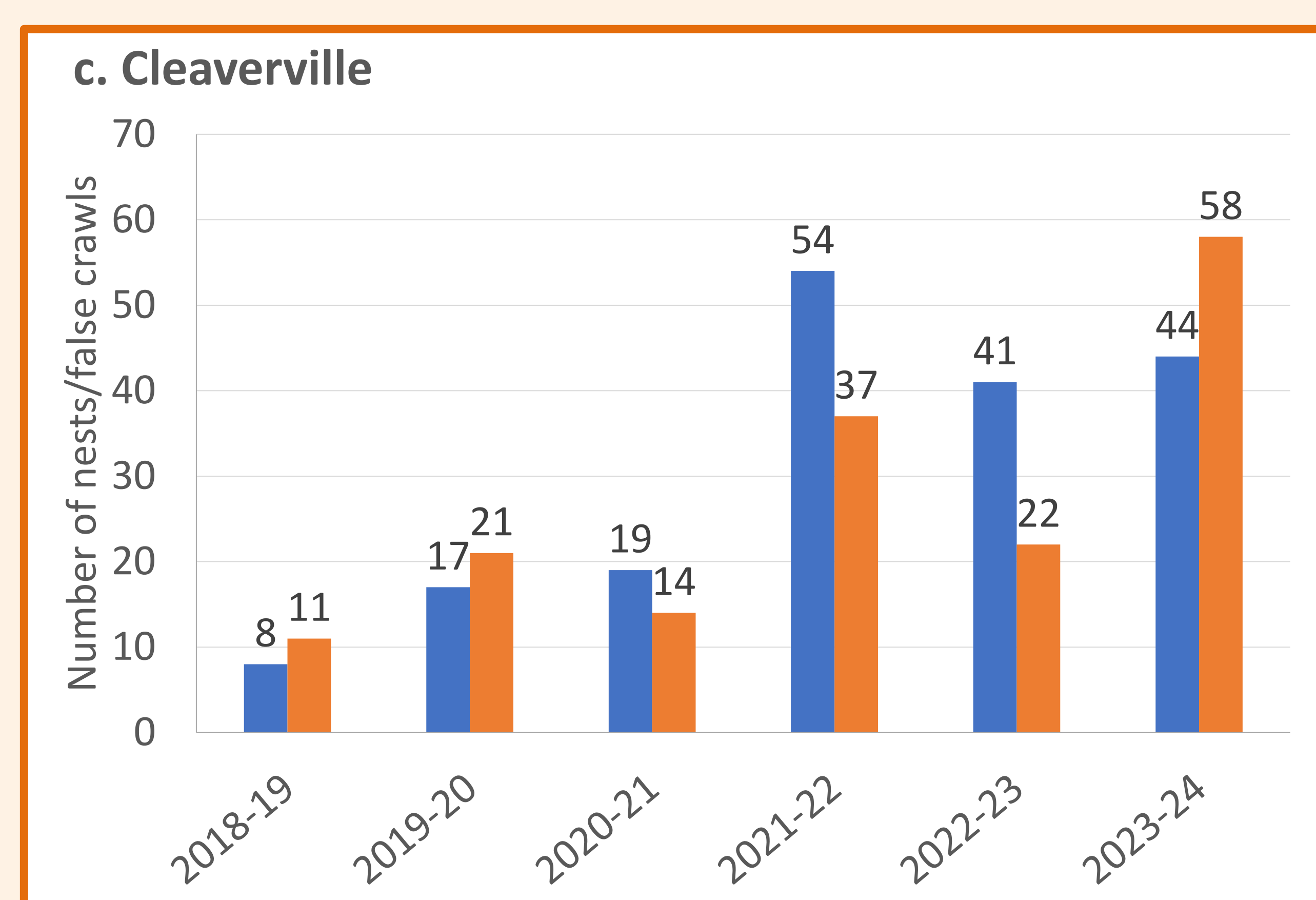
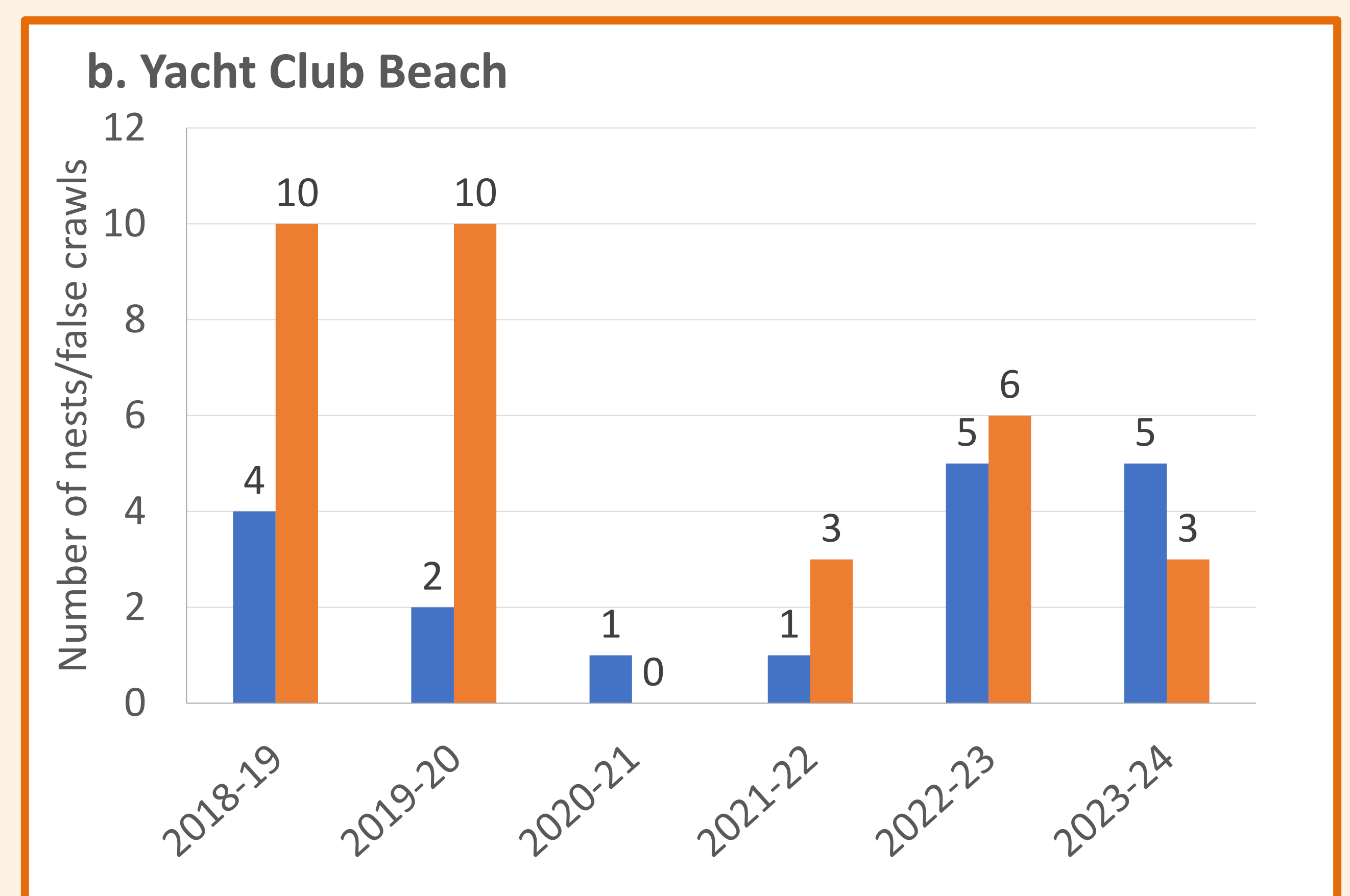
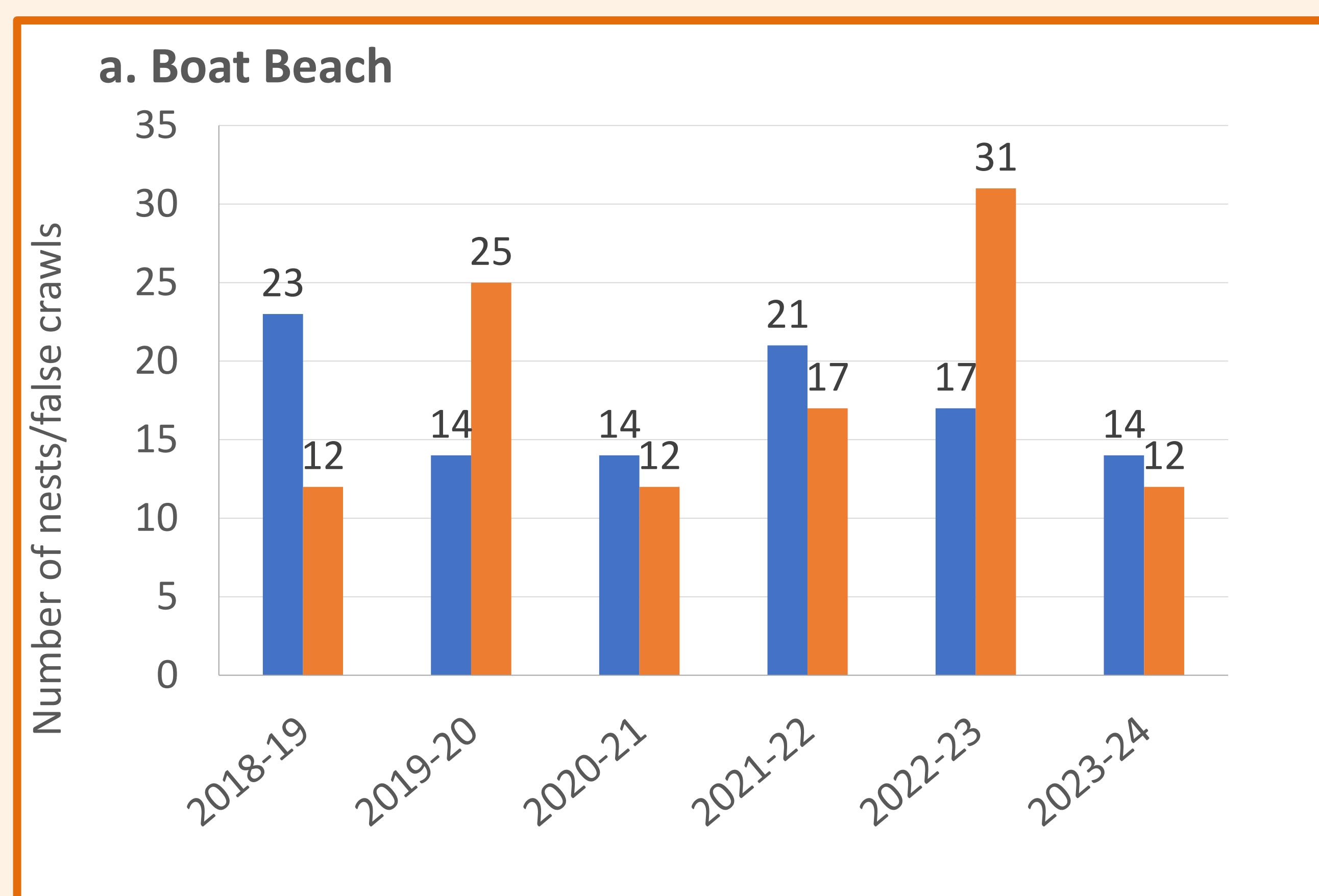
West Pilbara Turtle Program



PROGRAM SUMMARY 2023-24

Our findings – long-term nesting trends continued

- There are now six years of comparative data for Boat Beach, Yacht Club Beach and Cleaverville. Figures a-c below show the number of nests (blue bars) and false crawls (orange bars) over the same period each year at each beach.
- The number of nests and false crawls recorded at Boat Beach in 2023-24 were like previous years (Figure a).
- At Yacht Club Beach there was similar turtle activity in 2023-24 compared with last season and seasons 2018-19 and 2019-20 (Figure b).
- At Cleaverville, the number of nests and false crawls recorded was similar to the last two seasons but higher than all seasons before that (Figure c). Note years 2018-19 and 2019-20 there were fewer sampling days only covering 25 November to 19 December compared with more recent years that covered 7 November – 16 January.
- It is evident from the past six monitoring seasons that flatback turtles are consistently using Boat Beach, Yacht Club Beach and Cleaverville to nest.



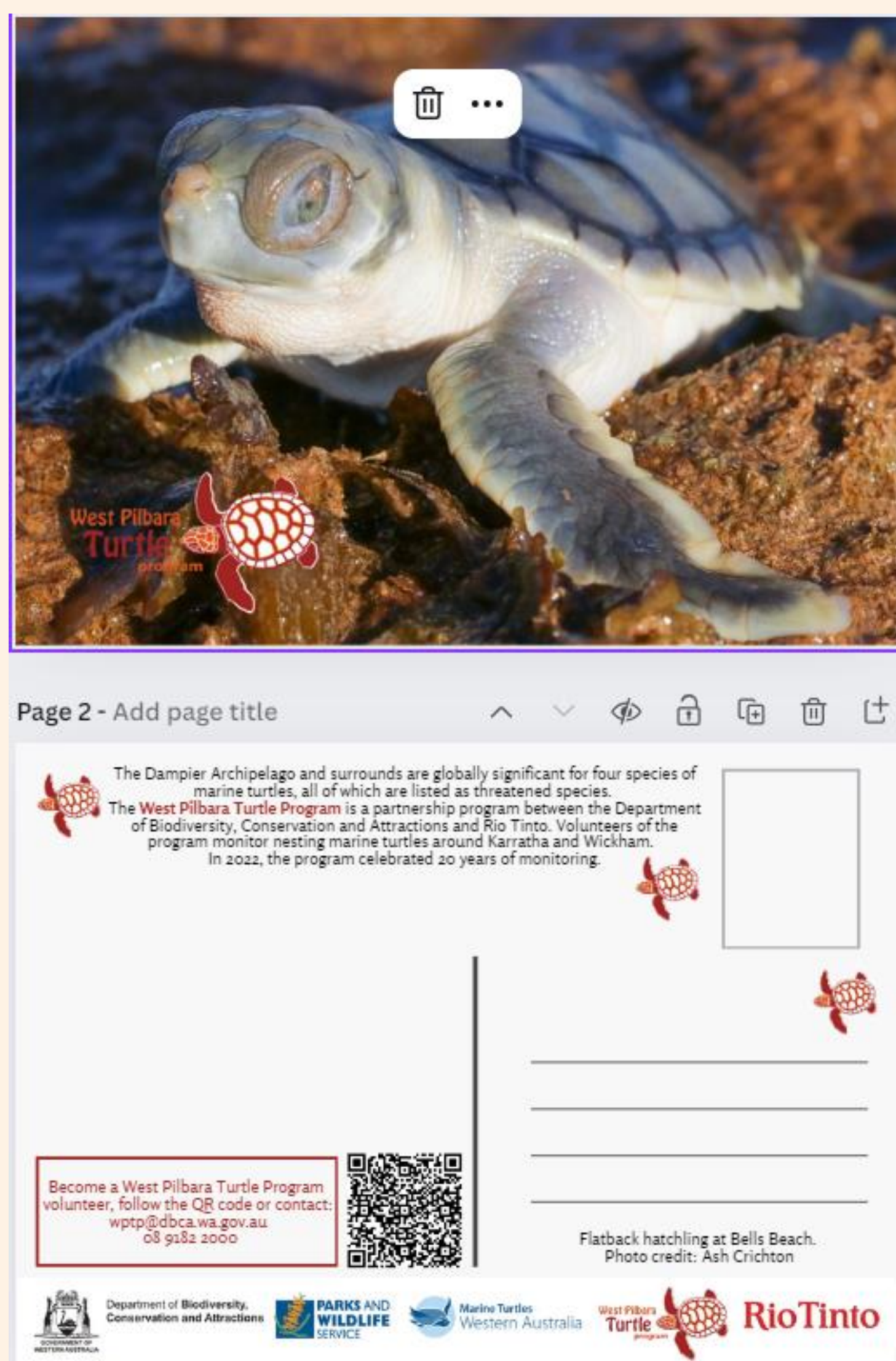
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West Pilbara Turtle Program



PROGRAM SUMMARY 2023-24

Other achievements – promotion and education



Promotional merchandise

Promotional activities

In 2023-24 there were 22 activities, events or products delivered to promote the program. These included:

- Regular Facebook posts
- Distribution of merchandise at FeNaCING Festival, National Science Week display, the Karratha Visitors Centre, the Program Launch, Dampier market stall and Port Walcott Yacht Club Display
- Distribution of flyers at shopping centres, sports precincts, libraries and visitor centres
- Advertisements and flyers on Rio Tinto site screens, social media and newsletters
- Merchandise produced and distributed including postcards, WPTP pins and drink bottles
- Newspaper advertisement and advertising on Volunteering WA and seek
- Radio interviews with ABC North West and Ngaarda Media.

Educational activities

Educational activities were again a key focus for the WPTP in 2023-24. Across Karratha, Wickham, Roebourne and Dampier 50 educational activities were delivered. These included:

- 19 talks at local primary and secondary schools and eight turtle sessions with pre-kindy students at Karratha Community House
- Family Fun time at Karratha library
- 11 night tours to show the community turtle nesting at Bells Beach including one tour with the Roebourne Police and Community Youth Centre (PCYC), one with St Luke's STEM Academy and one with Clontarf year 7 and 8 students
- Three family monitoring days to introduce people to the program and look for hatchlings
- Various stalls at festivals and school events including National Science Week Fair at Karratha Senior High School, STEM Open Day at St Luke's College, FeNaCING Festival and the Karratha Chamber of Commerce and Industry Career Expo
- Beach clean-ups with Pilbara Dive and Tours and Wickham Tidy Towns
- World Sea Turtle Day Scavenger Hunt activity.



Polly Farmer STEM Centre students with Tim Hunt and Sarah McDonald, DBCA

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West Pilbara Turtle Program



PROGRAM SUMMARY 2023-24

Other achievements – working with others

Working with others

In 2023-24, the WPTP continued to work closely with a range of stakeholders to deliver events and jointly manage turtle nesting beaches. For the sixth year in a row, we worked with Wickham Tidy Towns to launch the turtle monitoring season and clean-up Wickham beaches. We also worked with Pilbara Dive and Tours to clean-up Dampier turtle nesting beaches.

On Boat Beach during the turtle monitoring season we worked with the City of Karratha to protect turtle nests laid in the vehicle traffic zone by fencing nests with bunting and putting up signs. We also worked with the City of Karratha to complete the installation of new turtle rookery and “Avoid driving on the beach” signage around Boat Beach.

This year, we continued to work with other turtle programs, particularly North West Shelf Flatback Turtle Program and Rosemary Island Turtle Program, to ensure consistent messaging and methodology. At FeNaCING and turtle releases we also worked with the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation rangers.



Beach clean-up at Dampier with Pilbara Dive and Tours and Keep Australia Beautiful



New signs at Wickham



Turtle release with Murujuga Rangers



Program launch with Wickham Tidy Towns

For more information contact the WPTP Coordinator. Phone: 9182 2031. Email: wptp@dbca.wa.gov.au

West Pilbara Turtle Program



PROGRAM SUMMARY 2023-24

Summary

- This monitoring season, all sites (Bells Beach, Boat Beach, Yacht Club Beach and Cleaverville) were successfully monitored for three periods, with monitoring undertaken by volunteers or the program coordinator.
- At Bells Beach, the number of nests recorded was the highest on record. For the past three seasons, there have been very high numbers of nests compared with previous years.
- We now have six years of nesting data for Boat Beach and Cleaverville, areas used regularly for recreation. Flatback turtles are consistently nesting at these beaches commonly where people are driving on the beach.
- Interestingly, false crawls were slightly higher at Bells Beach and Cleaverville this year. Many turtles at Bells Beach were observed to false crawl seemingly due to dry sand collapsing their egg chambers. This is consistent with a lack of rainfall in the area for much of 2023.
- Disturbance recorded was low on Bells Beach, although one cat and one dog track was observed.
- Disturbance at Boat Beach and Cleaverville was consistent with previous years with high vehicle disturbance recorded in nesting areas and evidence of dog and cat activity across these sites.
- New signs were installed around Wickham by the City of Karratha including “Avoid beach driving” and “Turtle Rookery” signs at all major beach access points. As with previous years, Facebook posts also highlighted turtle nesting on local recreational beaches.
- Promotion of the program was strong in 2023-24 with consistent presence of the WPTP on Facebook through the WPTP group, local Rio Tinto Facebook pages, P&WS Pilbara Facebook page and through other local community group pages.
- The Education pillar continues to be a strong component of the program with 50 activities delivered in 2023-24 across schools, community groups and events.
- In 2023-24, we continued our relationship with the Polly Farmer Karratha STEM Centre, Clontarf at Karratha Senior High School, St Luke’s College and Karratha Community House. We have worked with these schools and education organisations for the past five years.
- High numbers of volunteers were interested in the program in 2023-24. With 80 new volunteers signing up over the year and 64 new volunteers attending one of four training sessions. This was one of the highest numbers of new volunteers engaged in the program to date.
- Night tours were again very popular with 162 people participating in eight public tours to watch nesting turtles.
- Overall, the program has had positive community support and continues to deliver both turtle monitoring and community education of marine turtle conservation in the local area.



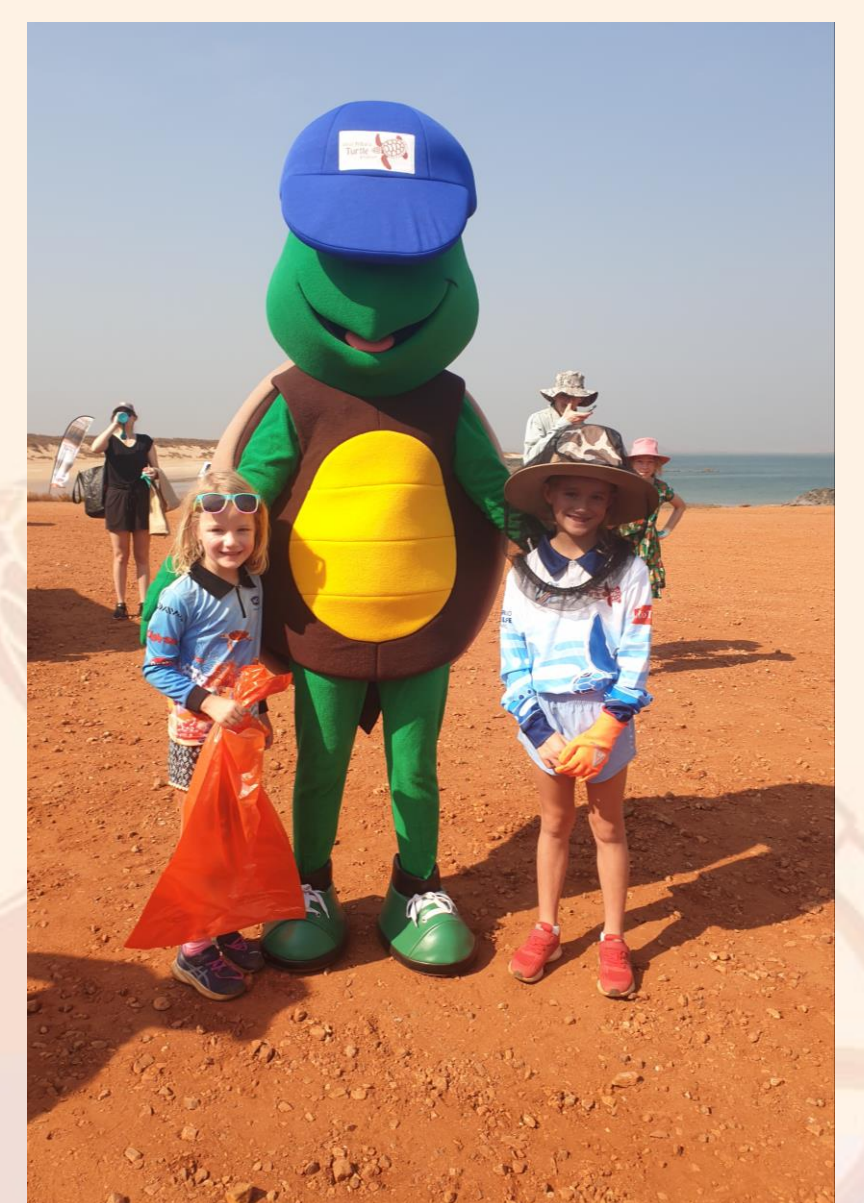
Flatback laying eggs, Bells Beach



Night tour with Clontarf



Family monitoring day at Bells Beach



Franki the flatback

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