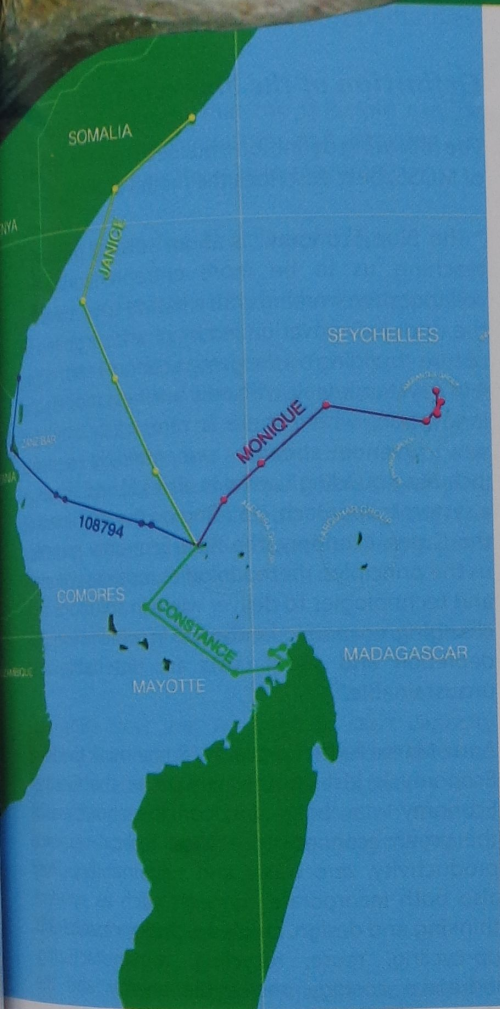


# A TURTLE'S JOURNEY: WHERE DO ALDABRA'S GREEN TURTLES GO?



Map showing routes of four of the tagged turtles

nesting Green Turtle population was the first to be protected in the Indian Ocean. Today, after more than 40 years of protection, the population has increased by 500–800% to an estimated 3100–5225 females nesting annually.

To learn more about the movements of these female Green Turtles when away from Aldabra and to assist with regional conservation efforts, SIF conducted a monitoring programme using satellite tags. The satellite monitoring involves attaching a Platform Terminal Transmitters (or PTTs) to the turtle's upper shell. The tag sends a message to a satellite whenever the turtle comes to the surface to breathe and the locations of the turtle are then plotted onto a map. Satellite tracking has the clear benefit of following an individual over time and long distances across water. By satellite tracking a number of female Green Turtles from Aldabra's growing population, we can identify the migration routes and feeding areas of these turtles and improve understanding of the threats posed to them when they are not in the vicinity of the atoll. Six female Green Turtles were fitted with a satellite transmitter. The transmitters were glued to the turtle's shell using marine epoxy following an existing protocol used in other tagging projects.

The initial results were exciting as the tagged turtles migrated in all directions, using the territorial waters of at least six countries (Seychelles, Madagascar, Comoro Islands, Tanzania, Kenya, and Somalia). They appeared to be using locations across the Western Indian Ocean to feed and rest while away from

**A**ldabra Atoll is home to the second largest nesting population of Green Turtles in the Western Indian Ocean, which makes it a key site for the species and vital for their long-term conservation in the region. As the organisation responsible for the management and protection of Aldabra, Seychelles Islands Foundation (SIF) undertook a satellite tagging project, funded by the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF), to find out more about Aldabra's breeding Green Turtles migration routes and feeding areas.

Green Turtles are one of the largest marine turtles and are in fact named for the greenish colour of their cartilage and fat, not their shells. They are found mainly in tropical and subtropical waters. Like other sea turtles, they migrate long distances between feeding grounds and the beaches from where they hatched. Classified as endangered on the IUCN Red List, Green Turtles are threatened globally by overharvesting of their eggs, hunting of adults, being caught in fishing gear and loss of nesting beach sites.

Intense human exploitation had reduced Aldabra's turtle numbers to an estimated 500–800 female Green Turtles nesting annually in the late 1960s. Then Aldabra was declared a nature reserve in 1968, and later in 1982 listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and its

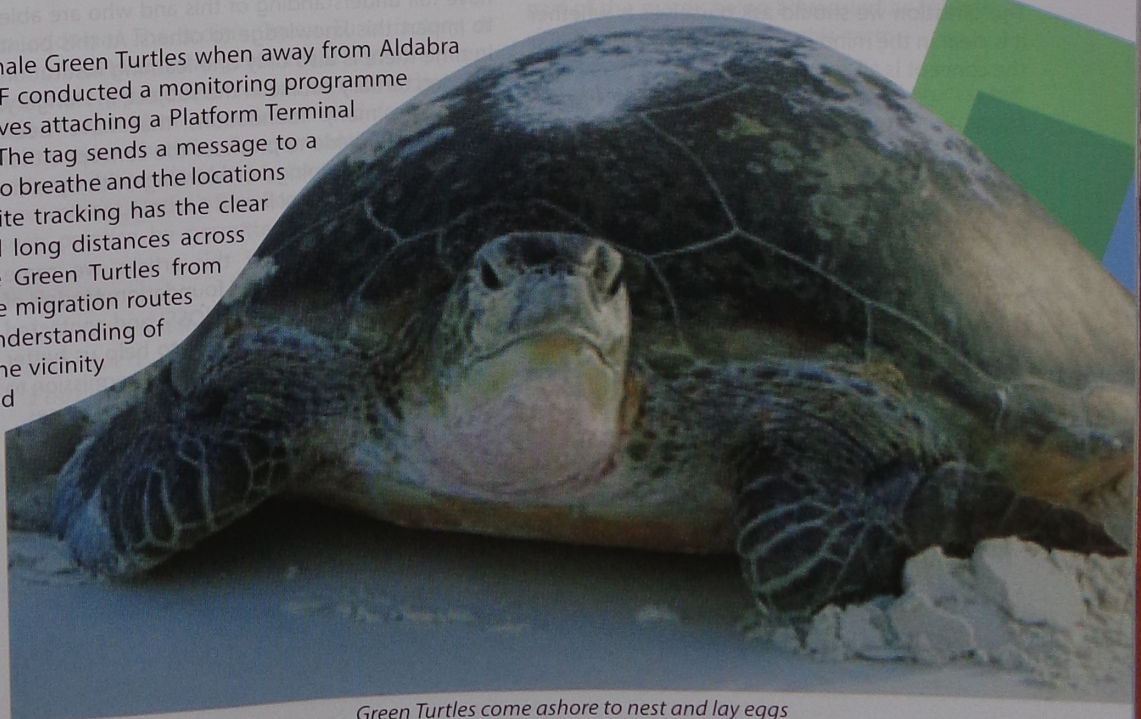


A female Green Turtle makes her way back to the sea with her new satellite tag attached to her shell

**Photographer credit: SIF**

Aldabra, and there was no indication of set migratory routes or foraging locations. This demonstrates the urgency for transboundary protection measures for marine turtles and the importance of internationally agreed protective measures such as the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) to which the Seychelles is party.

Turtle research on Aldabra is ongoing and SIF continues to attach flipper tags as part of a long term monitoring programme. There are also plans to attach more satellite tags in the future to help us better understand the long distance movements of these majestic reptiles.



Green Turtles come ashore to nest and lay eggs

**Photographer credit: RScott**