

Unmanned aircraft help scientists monitor endangered sea turtles

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Researchers at Duke University and North Carolina University have begun using unmanned aircraft to count endangered sea turtles along the Costa Rica coast. Sea turtles are very difficult to estimate because these animals live on the sea much, they just go up to the shore to lay eggs during the nesting season.

If counting these animals by boat in the sea or on the beach when they nest in some areas it is impossible to give an exact number.

Therefore, unmanned aircraft are equipped with high resolution cameras with excellent infrared vision. During flights, it will fly fixed 300 feet above the water level of Ostional National Wildlife Refuge. This position allows researchers to view a large area at the same time and see turtles under the water, where it is impossible to see widely if moving in a boat.



During the breeding season, the researcher discovered hundreds of thousands of sea turtles on the shore and they estimated that there are about 2,100 sea turtles per km² at the peak of the breeding season. This figure is much higher than scientists expected from data from these aircraft.

Vanessa Bézy, Dr. Vanessa Bézy said: *"Our findings show that unmanned aircraft can be used as a powerful tool to study the abundance of sea turtles at sea, and said Density of turtles in Ostional's near-shore*

environment ", Vanessa Bézy, candidate at UNC and co-research leader said. *"The development of this method provides new insights for the conservation and research of marine animals in the future".*

This study first used unmanned aircraft to count sea turtles.

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