

Heat threatens turtles

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SCIENTISTS warn it may be too hot for baby sea turtles to hatch.

Researchers sailed north on a month-long expedition from Cairns yesterday to assess the rising impact of climate change on the Great Barrier Reef. This comes amid grave concerns about the coming hatching season on remote Milman and Raine Islands off the tip of Cape York.

They believe that despite countless millennia of evolution, the world's largest rookeries of the green and hawksbill turtle face a threat to their survival in the aftermath of Australia's hottest decade and a record-breaking winter heatwave.

Mariana Fuentes, a PhD student and turtle expert, said things were heating up in Australia's tropics.

Her latest research shows that's not good news if you're a sea turtle.

"The optimum sand temperature for hatching is 24 to 33 degrees," the Brazilian-born biologist, of James Cook University, said yesterday.

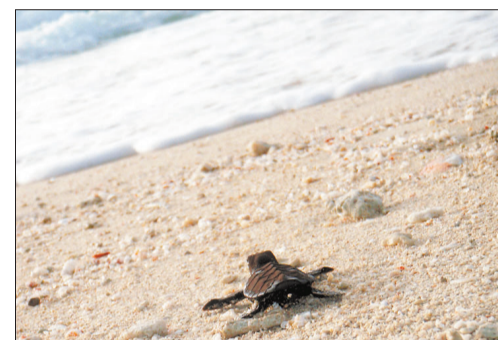
"Anything above that for an extended period is fatal to the eggs and they won't develop," she said.

Nearby Horn Island has averaged above 30C in the past six months with the highest recorded maximum temperature of 37.9C, weather bureau figures show.

Ms Fuentes' research measuring sand temperature for four years found



HATCHING A PROBLEM: PhD student Mariana Fuentes says heat bends the gender of sea turtles.



rising temperatures – anything above 29C – will result in the feminisation of turtle populations, making male turtles extremely rare.

Sea Turtle Foundation researchers will be on Milman Island, off the Jardine River National Park, throughout January to uncover how climate change may impact on sea turtles. Latest data, with turtles hatch-

ing eight weeks after nesting, will be collated in the next month.

Sea turtles from as far away as Indonesia and Vanuatu are now converging on northern Queensland beaches for their annual nesting season.

Most baby sea turtle hatchlings appear between January and March.

"Turtle hatchling gender is

determined by sand temperature during egg incubation," Sea Turtle Foundation project manager for David Roe said.

"Cooler sands produce male turtles and warmer sands produce females.

"If the sand is too hot the eggs will not hatch at all.

"Rising sand temperatures from global warming could cause future

generations of sea turtles to have insufficient males.

"Rising sea levels and increased heights of storm surges also pose problems.

"If nests are swamped with sea water the eggs may not hatch. Climate change could prove to be the final straw that means we lose sea turtles in our oceans forever," Mr Roe said.

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New Year starts with \$1.6m win

WHILE most people started their New Year with lots of resolutions they hope to keep, a woman in her fifties from the Tweed Heads area has kicked off 2010 with a magnificent \$1.6 million Gold Lotto prize from the weekend's Megadraw.

In the mad rush leading up to Christmas, the woman from Tweed Heads purchased several tickets in the \$30 million Gold Lotto Megadraw to give to family and friends, hoping that they'd really have a Christmas to remember. She bought one ticket too many and decided to keep the lucky last one for herself, and you can guess what happened next.

"It's amazing that I ending up keeping that ticket. It must have been meant to be", the woman said.

The woman realised she had won

her \$1,666,666.67 division one prize when she checked the morning paper for the Megadraw result. When she saw her numbers in print it was hard to contain her excitement, but she kept her cool and waited until Golden Casket officially confirmed the big win.

"I was quietly excited because I didn't really believe it. Yet when Golden Casket said yes, it's true, I jumped for joy and went a little crazy. Honestly, I'm still shaking."

So, what does she plan to do with over \$1.6 million? The winner says she'll take her time and think about what she'll do with the windfall, however she definitely wants to share her good fortune and help out her family. As for spoiling herself, a new car is definitely on the cards.

For the record, there were two first division winners in Queensland, the other being in Gladstone with a ticket bought from Newsxpress Kin Kora. As for the Tweed Heads woman, she purchased her winning 12 game Quickpick from Twin Towns Casket Agency.

The big winning numbers were: 12, 5, 42, 16, 34, 33 and the supplementary numbers were 32 and 30.

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