

# West Pilbara Turtle Program



## PROGRAM SUMMARY 2022-23

### Background – 20 years of WPTP



WPTP volunteers receiving certificates at the 20 year celebration (left; the Forster family, Right; Kelly Lothian with Sarah McDonald, WPTP Coordinator)



Tim Hunt, Program Coordinator, DBCA presenting at the 20 year celebration

#### A brief history of the program

- The program is a partnership between Rio Tinto and the Parks and Wildlife Service (P&WS) of the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA), bringing together industry, government and the community to monitor, raise awareness and protect marine turtles across the Pilbara
- WPTP has been operating since 2002, with first data collected for a pilot project in December 2002. In March 2023, the program celebrated its 20 year anniversary
- Over 681 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 allowing the continuation of the long-term dataset at Bells Beach and further opportunity to educate the community about turtle conservation and protection.

#### Monitoring methodology 2022-23

- 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 peak nesting periods to gain a broader insight into turtle activity in the region:
  - 7 – 25 November 2022
  - 26 November – 19 December 2022
  - 2 – 16 January 2023
- 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 and used 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](mailto:wptp@dbca.wa.gov.au)

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## PROGRAM SUMMARY 2022-23

### Our findings – monitoring data

#### Monitoring effort

- This year, there were 168 volunteer days covering four beaches.

#### Species identified

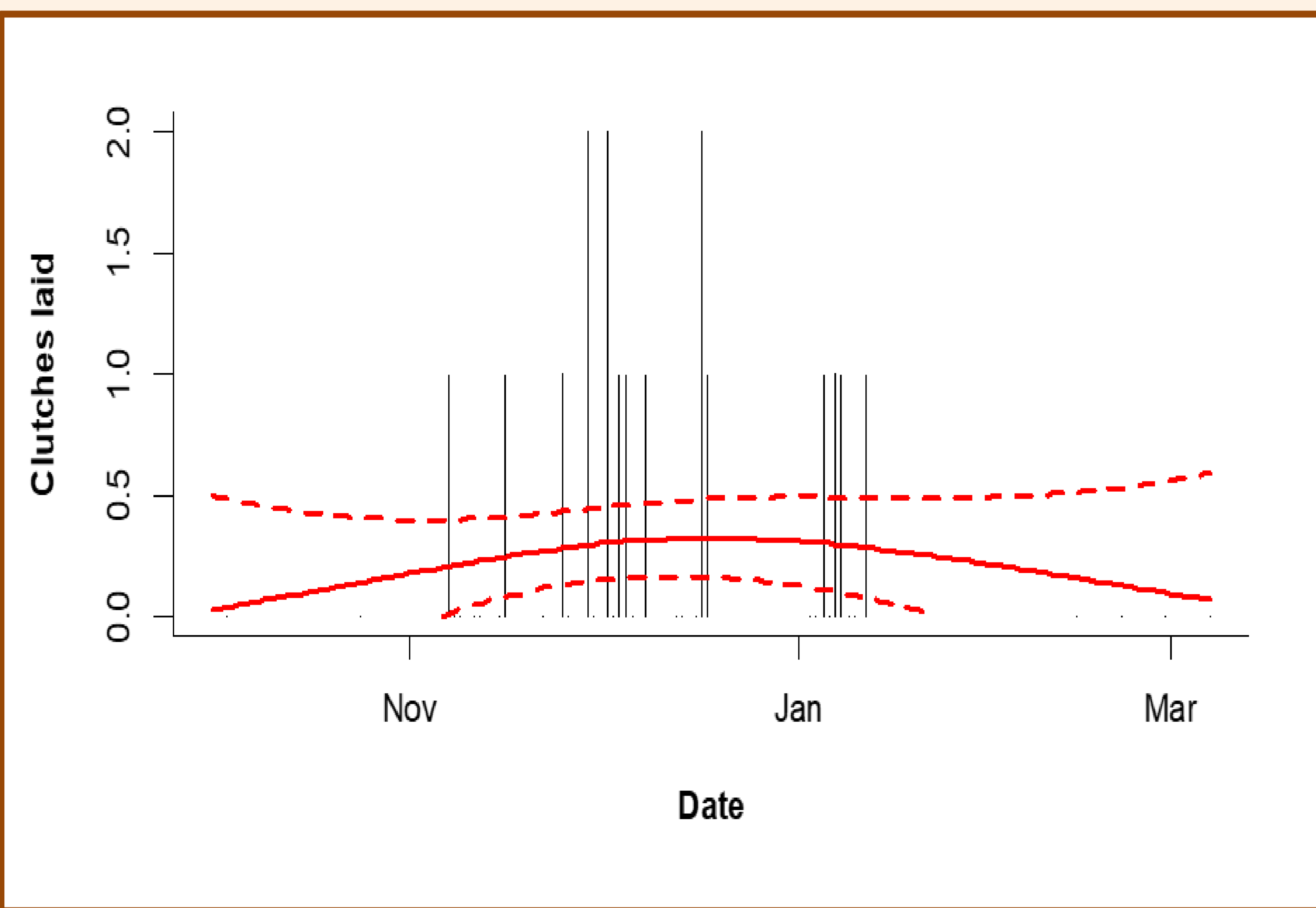
- All tracks and nests were identified as belonging to flatback (*Natator depressus*) turtles.

#### Predation/disturbance 2022-23

- At Bells Beach and Yacht Club Beach there was no general disturbance (not near a particular nest) recorded.
- At Boat Beach there was a moderate level of disturbance recorded with 13 days showing vehicle activity. One dog and two unknown disturbances were recorded.
- At Cleaverville high levels of disturbance were recorded with 56 days of vehicle activity, four dog tracks, two cat tracks and two unknown.
- The reporting of vehicle disturbance is certainly being under reported at Boat Beach in our monitoring and will be a focus of 2022-23.
- Predator trapping was undertaken by Rio Tinto at Bells Beach in August and November 2022.

#### Number of monitoring days and nests recorded at each monitoring beach, 2022-23.

Site	Days monitored	Nests
Bells and Yacht Club beaches combined	57	270
Boat Beach	57	17
Cleaverville	54	41

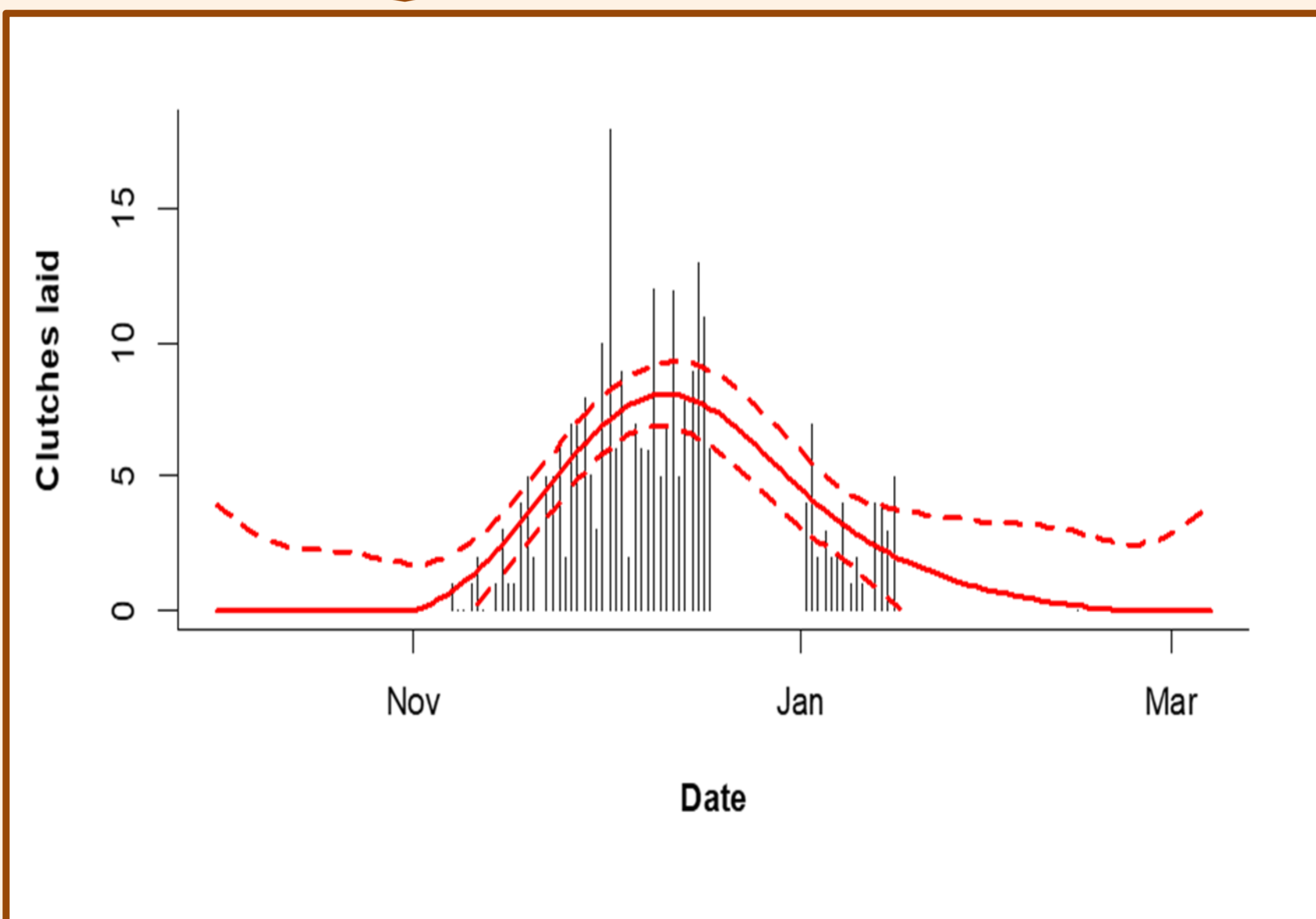


#### Boat Beach 2022-23

- Actual count: **17 nests over 57 days**
- Model prediction: **33 nests for season (error range: 9-74)**
- Black vertical bars are actual counts, red lines show model with upper and lower limits.

#### Bells Beach 2022-23

- Actual count: **265 nests over 57 days**
- Model prediction: **382 nests for season (error range: 266-690)**
- Black vertical bars are actual counts, red lines show model with upper and lower limits.



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Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions



Marine Turtles Western Australia



Rio Tinto

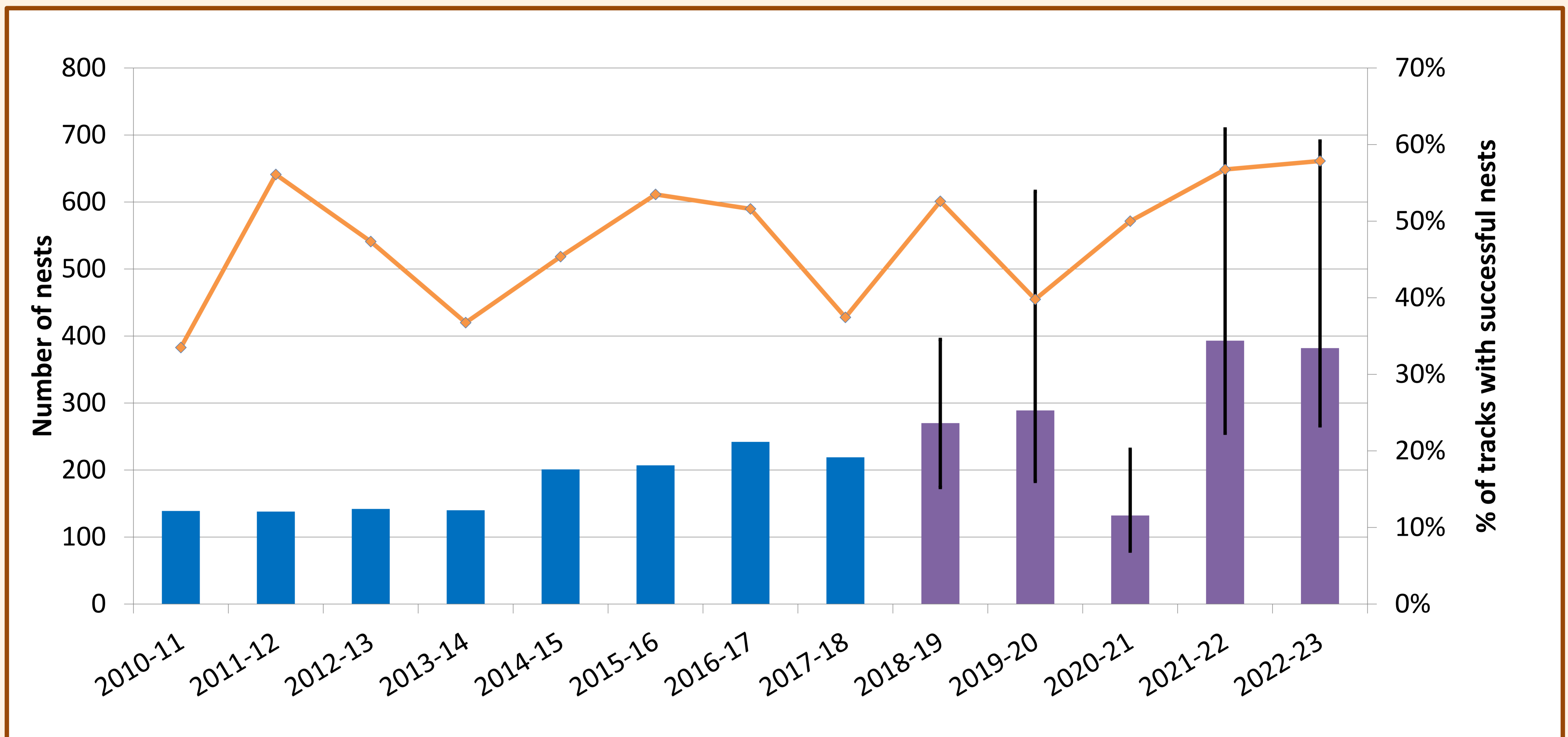
# West Pilbara Turtle Program



## PROGRAM SUMMARY 2022-23

### Our findings – long term nesting trends

- Overall, the number of nests (modelled) for 2022-23 was the second highest on record since 2010-11 (see figure below) with 382 nests estimated.
- Over the same date ranges, we recorded 265 nests this year (2022-23) compared with 252 last year (2021-22).
- Nest success (shown by orange line) was similar to last year.
- Overall, it was again a strong nesting season.



Note: Error bars for 2022-23 show the error range of the model used to predict 382 nests for the season at Bells Beach.



Flatbacks nesting at Bells Beach

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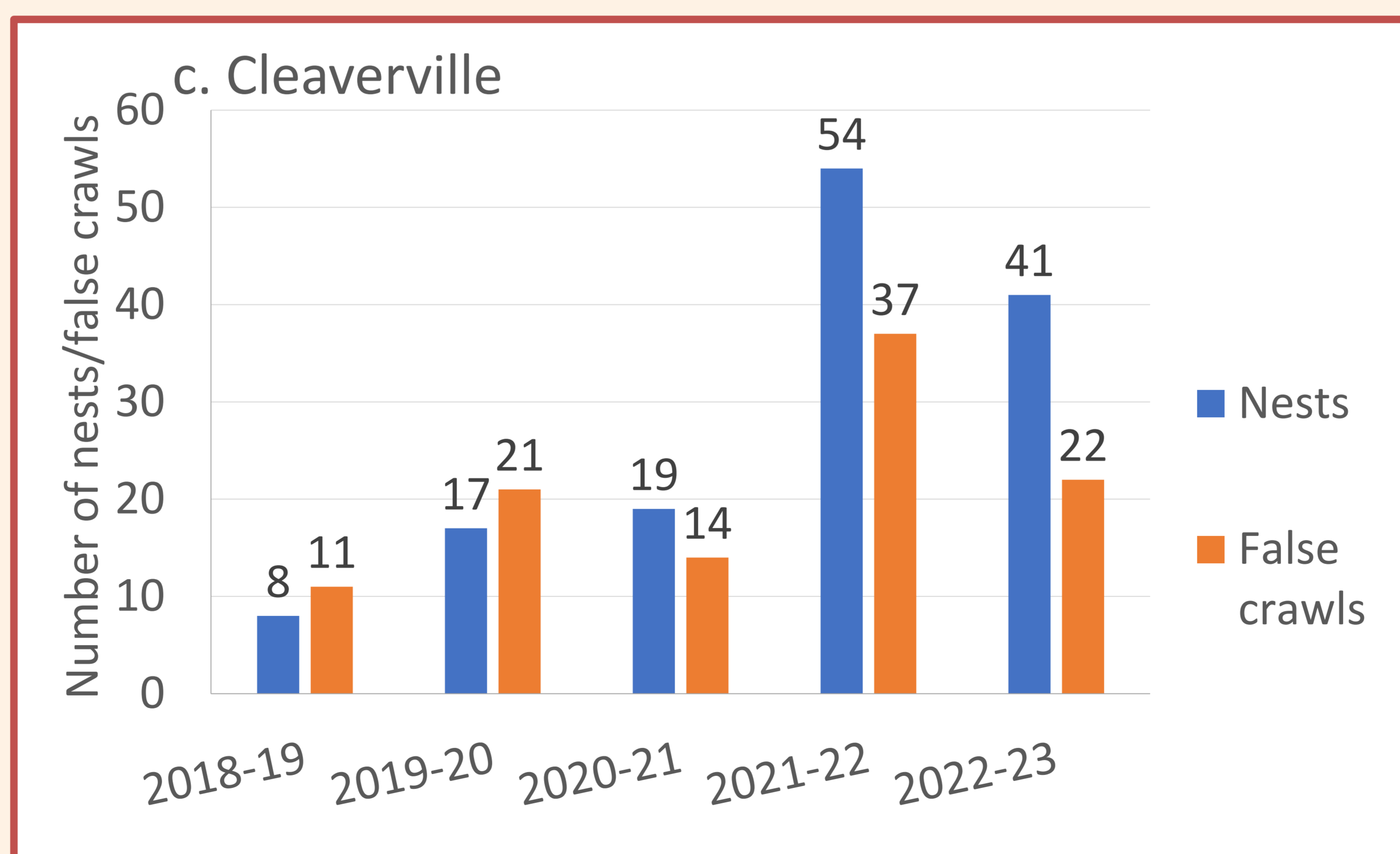
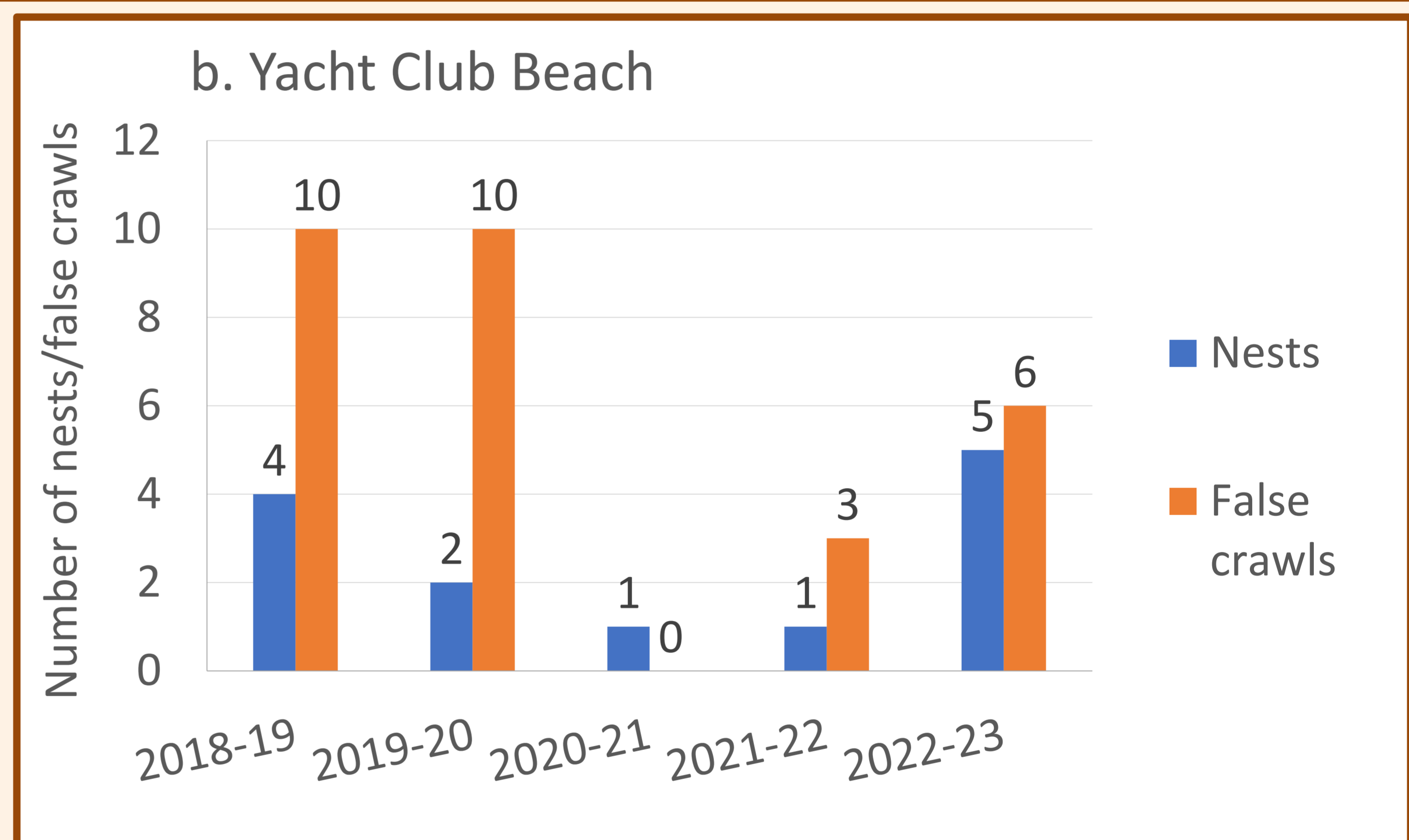
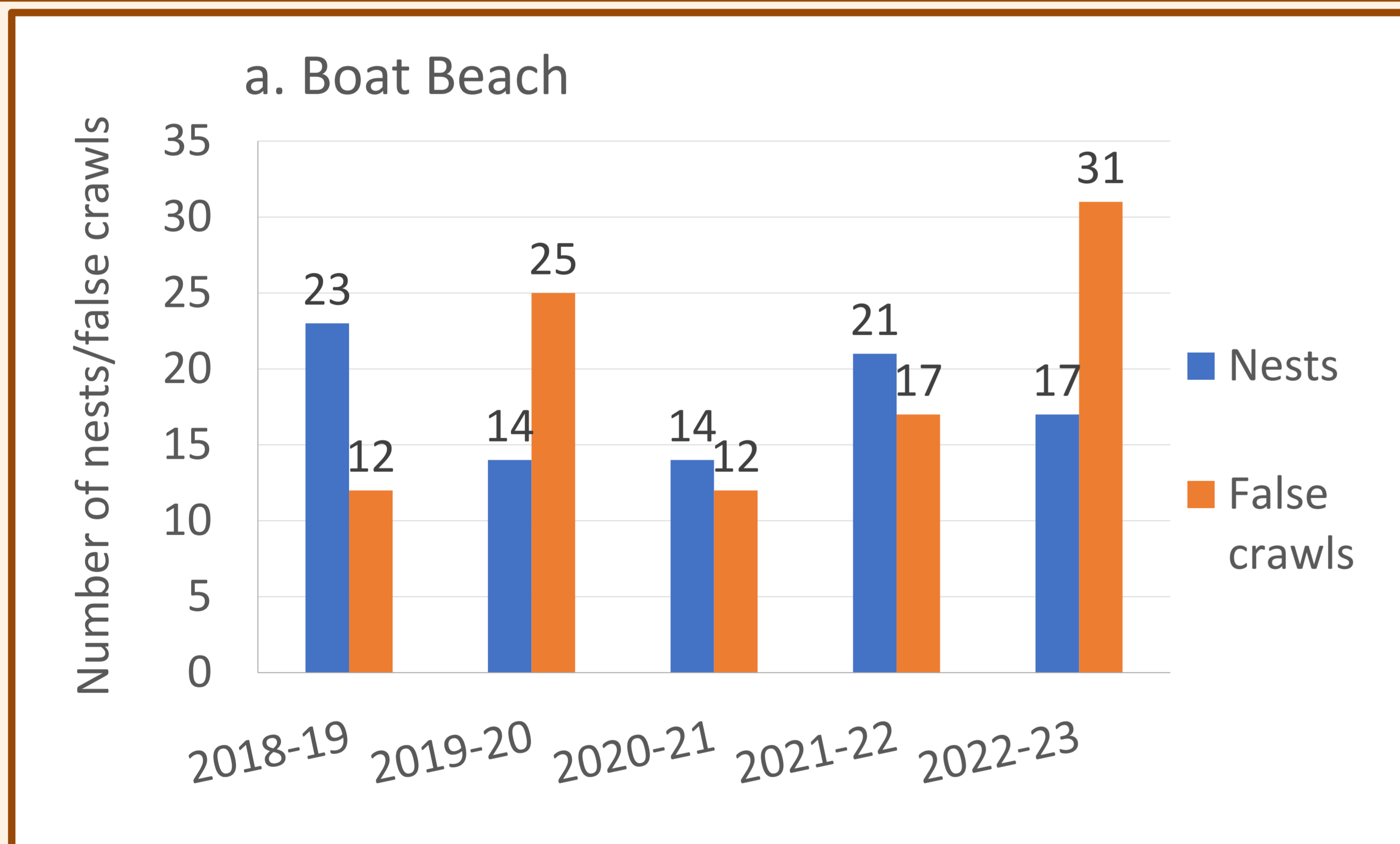
# West Pilbara Turtle Program



## PROGRAM SUMMARY 2022-23

### Our findings – long-term nesting trends continued

- There are now five years of comparative data for Boat Beach, Yacht Club Beach and Cleaverville. Figures a-c below show a comparison of the same number of days over the same period each year. The number of nests recorded at Boat Beach in 2022-23 were similar to previous years with slightly higher false crawls (Figure a).
- At Yacht Club Beach there was similar turtle activity in 2022-23 compared with seasons 2018-19 and 2019-20 and slightly higher nesting than the previous two years (Figure b).
- At Cleaverville, the numbers of nests and false crawls recorded was slightly lower than last season but higher than all seasons before that (Figure 11c). 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 five monitoring seasons that flatback turtles are consistently using Boat Beach, Yacht Club Beach and Cleaverville to nest, particularly at Boat Beach and Cleaverville.



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# West Pilbara Turtle Program



## PROGRAM SUMMARY 2022-23

### Other achievements – promotion and education



Promotional merchandise

#### Promotional activities

In 2022-23 there were more than 23 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 and other educational stalls
- 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 20 year commemorative fishing shirts and calico shopping bags
- Newspaper advertisement and advertising on Volunteering WA and seek
- Radio interviews with ABC North West and Ngaarda Media.



Night tour with St Luke's College

#### Educational activities

Educational activities were again a key focus for the WPTP in 2022-23. Across Karratha, Wickham, Roebourne and Dampier 67 educational activities were delivered. These included:

- 45 talks at local primary and secondary schools and eight turtle sessions with pre-kindergarten students at Karratha Community House
- Story time sessions at Dampier, Karratha and Wickham libraries
- 11 night tours to show the community turtle nesting at Bells Beach including one tour with the Roebourne Police and Community Youth Centre (PCYC)
- 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 Baynton West PS and FeNaCING Festival
- Beach clean-ups with Pilbara Dive and Tours and Wickham Tidy Towns
- Turtle information sessions with Rio Tinto Cape Lambert staff as part of turtle awareness month in October 2023.



Turtle talks to Rio Tinto employees at Cape Lambert

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## PROGRAM SUMMARY 2022-23

### Other achievements – working with others



Program launch with Wickham Tidy Towns



Beach clean-up at Cleaverville with Pilbara Dive and Tours



Work with the City of Karratha and Rio Tinto to fence nests on Boat Beach

#### Working with others

In 2022-23, the WPTP continued to work closely with a range of stakeholders to deliver events and jointly manage turtle nesting beaches. For the fifth 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 Cleaverville 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 install new turtle rookery and “Avoid driving on the beach” signage around Cleaverville and Boat Beach. There is more work to do to manage these beaches and complete the signage project in 2023-24.

This year, we also continued to work with other turtle programs to ensure consistent messaging and methodology. In particular, we worked closely with the North West Shelf Flatback Turtle Program and Rosemary Island Turtle Program to deliver educational activities.



World Turtle Day art display at Karratha Library. Turtles created by Karratha STEM academy.

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### Summary

- In 2022-23 the WPTP celebrated the significant milestone of 20 years of operation. From the humble beginnings of a local community group to the strong and ongoing partnership between Parks and Wildlife Service (P&WS) and Rio Tinto, the program has become an important part of the local community. Volunteers, Rio Tinto and P&WS celebrated this milestone with a celebration in March 2023 and acknowledged the incredible effort of over 600 volunteers over the last two decades.
- 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. Unfortunately, three days were missed at Cleaverville due to volunteers being unable to fulfill their rostered day at short notice.
- At Bells Beach, the number of nests recorded (382 nests) was the second highest on record since 2010-11. Last year, 2021-22 was the highest on record.
- We now have five 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.
- Disturbance recorded was low on Bells Beach but higher on Boat Beach and Cleaverville where vehicle activity was recorded regularly in nesting areas and there was evidence of dogs and cats on the beach.
- The Education pillar of the program continues to grow each year. This year there were 67 activities across schools, community groups and events both in person and online.
- In 2022-23, we continued our relationship with the Polly Farmer Karratha STEM Centre, Clontarf at Karratha Senior High School and St Luke's College.
- Night tours were very popular this year with 172 people participating in ten tours. The opportunity to see turtles nesting has resulted in a lot of interest in marine turtles within the community. An additional tour was run for the Roebourne PCYC
- The WPTP and North West Shelf Flatback Turtle Conservation Program (NWSFTCP) continued their work together, sharing knowledge and ensuring consistent messaging and activities across the region. Work continued to develop a Cultural Connections to Sea Country and Sea Turtles project with Ngarluma Aboriginal Corporation and local traditional owners and to develop educational materials to be delivered in schools.
- 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.



Watching a flatback return to the water at a Bells Beach nesting tour



WPTP volunteers helping with Rio Tinto's nest excavation work at Bells Beach

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