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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

New Hammerhead Shark Study Demonstrates the Importance of “swimways” in Securing the Protection of Marine Endangered Species

San Jose, Costa Rica (March 15th, 2019) -

The study, [*“Movements of scalloped hammerhead sharks \(*Sphyrna lewini*\) at Cocos Island, Costa Rica and between oceanic islands in the Eastern Tropical Pacific”*](#) was released in PLOS One, an open-access scientific journal published by the Public Library of Science (PLOS) since 2006. This multi-institutional research effort demonstrates the importance of marine protected areas and migratory routes in securing the protection of marine fauna.

The study is part of the regional MigraMar initiative to understand the movement behavior of endangered marine migratory species with respect to marine reserves. Elena Nalesso, who published the research as part of obtaining her Master's thesis at Centro de Investigación Científica y de Educación Superior de Ensenada, (CICESE) in Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico and her co-authors, a group of scientists based throughout the Eastern Tropical Pacific, tagged hammerhead sharks with acoustic tags at oceanic island hotspots in the region to study their movements within Cocos Island marine protected area and between Cocos Island National Park (Costa Rica), Galapagos National Park (Ecuador) and Malpelo Nature Reserve (Colombia).

“Some hammerhead sharks showed a strong residency to Cocos Island but our research also indicated that these sharks migrate between the protected hotspots at oceanic islands, moving through the open ocean where there is little or no protection from commercial fishing operations” said Nalesso.

The research suggest that the Galapagos and Malpelo populations may use Cocos as a navigational waypoint or stopover during seasonal migrations to the coastal Central and South America. This not only demonstrates the relationship of the oceanic islands and the importance of their conservation for marine fauna, but also exposes the possibility of creating a hotspots network to protect the migration of this endangered species in the Tropical Pacific Oriental.

Dr. Alex Hearn, professor and researcher at the Galapagos Science Center, Universidad San Francisco de Quito, Ecuador, and one of Elena Nalesso's research supervisors, said that “The implications for management and conservation of this research indicates that protecting oceanic hotspots is critical but insufficient for the protection of hammerheads, and conservation efforts must also include protecting their migratory routes if we are to recover these endangered species”.

“The new marine ecology researchers face great challenges to develop the knowledge for the conservation of marine fauna and its sustainable use, under the pressure of rapid growth of the world population and its demand for food”, commented Dr. Oscar Sosa-Nishizaki, Elena Nalesso’s supervisor at CICESE.

Todd Steiner, executive director of Turtle Island Restoration Network share that “To secure the protection of highly migratory species we need new conservation tools such as the proposed ‘Cocos – Galapagos Swimway’ that will create protected superhighways that link oceanic hotspot marine protected areas”.

Randall Arauz, currently Marine Conservation Policy Advisor of Fins Attached Marine Research and Conservation said “We are committed to continue this 14-year research project and provide the Costa Rican authorities with the best information possible in order to expand the marine protected area surrounding Cocos Island”.

All co-authors include **Elena Nalesso**^{1,2}, **Alex Hearn**^{3,4,5}, **Oscar Sosa-Nishizaki**¹, **Todd Steiner**^{4,5}, **Alex Antoniou**⁶, **Andrew Reid**⁷, **Sandra Bessudo**^{5,8}, **German Soler**^{5,8,9}, **A. Peter Klimley**^{5,10}, **Frida Lara**^{5,11}, **James T. Ketchum**^{5,11}, **Randall Arauz**^{2,5}

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