

The information and photos below are taken directly from the WIDECAST Latin America website <http://latinamericaseaturtles.org/> (note that to see the text on their webpage you must highlight it with your cursor).

WEAVING FOR NATURE

Sea turtles and other marine organisms and their critical habitats are affected by contamination by plastics. The Marine Conservation Centre (MCC) indicates that this is one of the 12 most important elements found in marine and coastal debris. The most severe impact of plastic bags is death of animals, especially sea turtles, caused by ingestion of these, when mistaken for other organisms such as jellyfish.

In Costa Rica, according to the report "State of the Nation" from 2003, 73,000 tons of plastic are imported each year of which more than 50% ends up as post-consumer plastics, discarded in open garbage dumps, disposed in the margins of many river basins or simply thrown into the sidewalks. In 2006 **WIDECAST** started a project to solve the problems created by plastic bags in the coastal areas, to help to improve the economic condition of families in local communities and to promote the generation of environmentally friendly products.



FAIR TRADE

One of the objectives of the project of converting supermarket's plastic bags into weaved purses is to promote fair trade.

This means that the women that produce these purses (weavers) are not only working under fair and unpressured working conditions, but also that all the hours invested in all stages of the production are equally recognized and acknowledged for, including the collection and washing of the plastic bags, preparation of the knitting, and of course, the weaving of the purses. Just in this last stage of the bag's production, a weaver with only one year of experience can invest between 16 and 30 hours of work in each purse, depending on the style and size of the purse.

If we request a reference value from Costa Rica's legislation, each citizen must receive by law a minimum salary of \$288/month, equivalent to \$1.8/hour. If each weaver is spending an average of 30 working hours including ALL stages of the production of each purse, its cost should be \$54/purse. This would be according to the requirements set by Costa Rican law, and represents the fair value of the purse according to the reference given. However, global society is not ready to pay this price for a product that is basically made of recycled material; therefore the actual price given rather reflects a balance between the market, the product and its fair trade value.



It is important to recognize that on average the weavers are producing about 3 purses a week, which means an income around \$180/month, making this activity an important complementary source of income. From the purse's total price, 20-25% goes directly into the support of sea turtle conservation activities, while 75% represents the direct income to the weavers, allowing them to invest in the improvement of their life's quality and their families.

The purses produced from plastic bags not only are durable, washable, comfortable, colourful and environmentally friendly, since they require the use of 50-80 plastic bags in its production. Because their production involves such a considerable quantity of plastic bags that would otherwise be wasted or discarded, this activity also sends out a clear message of what sustainable development means.

Remember that every time you purchase one of these bags, you are helping people in the coastal communities of Talamanca, Osa and Guanacaste. But you are also protecting the marine habitats by stopping these contaminants from reaching the sea. This way, sea turtles and marine mammals such as dolphins and whales will be less likely to ingest a plastic and die as a result. We invite you to purchase these bags and/or collect any plastic bags from your home, school, workplace and/or community and deliver these to the staff of the WIDECASTs sea turtle conservation project, leave them in the location where you read this article, or call us.

This project has allowed us to institute three production centers that involve the participation of more than 50 women, to avoid that 12.000 bags that would be otherwise imprudently rejected each month, and also to generate income for women who are mostly housewives.

