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## 'Tortoiseshell' Products Seized

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**COSTA** Rica showed the world it is serious about protection of endangered animals with two recent seizures of more than 2,700 hawksbill jewelry items from local artisans.

One confiscation was carried out in downtown San José Dec. 4 and the other in the Central Pacific port city of Puntarenas Dec. 22, Randall Arauz, director of the Costa Rican Sea Turtle Conservation Network (PRETOMA), told The Tico Times this week.

PRETOMA, which has long spoken out against hawksbill exploitation throughout Central America, worked under coordination of the ANAI/WIDECAST Association and in collaboration with officials from the Costa Rican Environment Ministry and the Coast Guard to seize the jewelry. Arauz and Roxana Silman, of the Caribbean Conservation Corporation, served as experts to identify the products as made from the beautiful and distinctive hawksbill shell.

**"MOST** artisans acknowledged [in interviews prior to the confiscations] that they knew the activity  
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was illegal, but showed no concern," said PRETOMA's Isabel Naranjo. "Local artisans claim most of these products are imported from Nicaragua, and their clients include Costa Ricans and tourists from the U.S. and Europe, clearly in violation of the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES)."

Didiher Chacón, of the ANAI Association, called the open commerce of hawksbill products "a shame to our authorities."

In a press release, he said his organization plans to continue to work alongside Costa Rican environmental authorities, and "additional efforts will be directed towards a campaign to promote 'hawksbill-free'

artisan shops," supplemented by an education campaign geared toward tourists.

**THE** hawksbill's shell, commonly known as "tortoiseshell," is often used to make combs, jewelry and other small trinkets. Killing the turtles is against the law in most countries — including all Central American countries — because they are in critical danger of extinction.

"There is little or no political will to take action, and these products are massively processed and sold in domestic markets and distributed internationally," said Arauz. "We hope other Central American countries will follow and ensure full enforcement of their own domestic sea turtle protection legislation."

Photo courtesy of the Costa Rican Sea Turtle Restoration Project



**MOUNDS** of illegal jewelry were seized in a recent effort to crack down on products made from the endangered hawksbill turtle