

Sea Turtles:

Invasion on St. Maarten during nesting season 2007

The nesting season got off to a slow start of with only 2 recorded Leatherback nests on Simpson Bay but picked up in the ensuing months. Between April and December 2007 volunteers of Nature Foundation observed 20 tracks of Green and Hawksbill turtles on Gibbs Bay, more than observed in previous years at that location.

When a female turtle crawls up the beach at night to nest, she leaves a distinguishable track in the sand. In the morning volunteers scan the known nesting beaches for these tracks. The tracks help Nature Foundation to determine the turtle species and whether she completed nesting or not. Many of the tracks are thought to be made by the same female. During nesting period a female will return three to four times every 9 to 15 days to nest.

Although there were 20 tracks, the amount of actual nests on Gibbs Bay remained unsure. Due to the number



Adult turtle track

of nesting beaches, the lack of manpower and the small amount of occasions that turtles actually come to land, Nature Foundation isn't able to carry out night patrols. A group of volunteers help with limited morning patrols, but this doesn't cover all beaches. Also, these morning observations are often hindered by heavy rain that wash away the tracks, making it harder to tell whether a nest was completed or not. For that reason Nature Foundation calculated the estimated hatching time and kept an eye on the possible nest spots until they were suspected to hatch.

At least two hatchings have been reported but unfortunately the fate of the other spots remained unknown. A few nests may have hatched unnoticed but also when studying the timeframe of the tracks, it is most likely that many of the reported tracks were *false* tracks. When female sea turtles crawl up the beach to lay, they become very exposed and are therefore very wary of interference. Crawling into an obstruction such as rubbish or a sandcastle, or being disturbed by noise or light will keep her from completing her goal. She returns to the water without laying. We call such found tracks *false* tracks because they don't leave a nest. If she doesn't have sufficient time to

make another journey to the beach at the same or on a following night, she will dump the eggs in the sea and all the potential hatchlings will be lost. Still, the reasons why all hatchings are not completed successfully remains unknown. Nests may drown, being dug too close to the ocean or a bacterial infection might have destroyed the nest. There have not been any observations of excavated nest spots by people or animals.

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Coming up ...

Work on Terrestrial Protected Areas Proposal / Management Plan underway...

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Dear Friends,

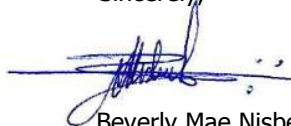
We are once again at the end of another year, Nature Foundation's 10th anniversary as a matter of fact, and unfortunately we were unable to execute many of our planned projects primarily because of staffing shortage. In addition, the Marine Park Ordinance—with the built-in funding mechanism that will enable long-term financial sustainability for the Foundation—remains unfinalized. This situation offers a bleak outlook on the short-term future.

Fortunately in recent years, there has been an emergence of new local nature conservation and watchdog organizations. We each fill different niches in the world of nature conservation and lobbying but our goals are the same: environmental protection of our island's natural, cultural and historical resources on land and sea. Each organization does outstanding work to this end.

In an economic and political environment that does not facilitate easy access to necessary funds, the need for the establishment of an Environmental Trust Fund becomes even more apparent and underscores the importance of your continued support all of the conservation NGOs.

Compliments of the Season and a Happy & Healthy 2008 to each of you!

Sincerely,



Beverly Mae Nisbeth
Marine Park Manager

Work on Terrestrial Protected Areas Proposal / Management Plan underway...

Nature Foundation St. Maarten is currently working to see the establishment of Terrestrial Protected Areas (TPAs) and to produce a proposal / management plan for St. Maarten Terrestrial Parks.

Management planning is a very important step in making sure the land parks are run properly over the coming years. The goals of the management planning process are firstly, to produce clear objectives for the land parks with

an action plan and secondly, to establish methods of monitoring the success of the management.

For many years Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance (DCNA) had been trying to get project support from National Forestry Management (Staatsbosbeheer) in the Netherlands to have management plans developed for Terrestrial Protected Areas in the Windward Islands. And last June (2007) Jan Blok, managing consultant

at Staatsbosbeheer, was assigned to work on such plans for Saba, St Eustatius and St. Maarten with DCNA.

The project will have three consultants (Jan Blok, Mary Olson and Duncan MacRae) and will include the whole process of stakeholder input and planning scheduled for early 2008.

The management plan will address recommendations for the establishment and management of the proposed TPAs as land parks.

Sea Turtles: Invasion on St. Maarten during nesting season '07 cont'd

Nature Foundation has been monitoring the beaches of Dutch St. Maarten for sea turtle nests since 1999. In general, Leatherbacks open the nesting season in April on Simpson Bay and the season continues in June on the south coast, where Hawksbills and Green turtles subsequently start their nesting season. On St. Maarten the most important nesting beaches are Mullet Bay, Maho, Cupecoy, Simpson Bay, Guana Bay and Dawn Beach. The last three years Gibbs Bay and Guana Bay formed the core of this monitoring, since the south-east coast

appeared to have the most nests. Dawn Beach used to be the main nesting beach of all but became less attractive for nesting after the development of Westin. Compared to 4 recorded nests in 2005 and 1 in 2006, this amount of sea turtle activity on Gibbs Bay is a tremendous increase in observed interest in this beach. This could well be related to the fact that nesting on Dawn Beach is no longer feasible to the turtles. The females tend to return to the beach they once were hatched themselves but if that is impossible they relocate to a nearby

beach option. Hopefully Gibbs Bay remains an attractive nesting beach for turtles after the completion of the recent development on that location.

We can be very proud that we still have these critically endangered animals on our island of which only 1 out of 1000 hatchlings make it to adulthood due to many threats they are face. Nature Foundation is working on getting a full time sea turtle coordinator on board for the next season.

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VACANCIES

EDUCATION COORDINATOR

The education programme is a joint three-year programme together with St. Eustatius National Parks (STENAPA) and Saba Conservation Foundation.

Requirements:

1. Candidate must have at minimum a professional diploma with training in education or a teacher training degree (primary and/or secondary) with a focus on biology, environment and nature
2. The candidate is an enthusiastic creative individual with good social skills
3. Candidate must be able to work independently as well as in a team
4. Candidate should have good written and oral command of English and Dutch, Spanish a plus.
5. Must be willing and able to travel monthly to St. Eustatius and Saba

For more information please contact Nature Foundation at 544-4267

MARINE PARK RANGERS

Requirements:

1. Candidate must be able to handle small vessels
2. Candidate must have a valid and clean driver's license
3. Candidate must be a certified diver
4. Candidate must be willing and able to meet the requirements of becoming a law enforcement officer (Buitengewoon Agent van Politie)
5. Mechanic certification an advantage
6. First aid certification an advantage
7. Must be a capable team player and customer friendly
8. Candidate must have clean police record

For more information please contact Nature Foundation at 544-4267



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2 bumper stickers to support the marine and terrestrial wildlife of St. Maarten.

\$2 per sticker



T-Shirts

High quality Fruit of the Loom cotton T-shirts

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Available in Sizes: S, M, L, XL, XXL



Book

Dr Robert Powell's beautifully illustrated book on the Reptiles and Amphibians of the Dutch Windward Islands



ECO Bags

Made of recyclable material. "Every Bag Counts" so please help to reduce the number of plastic bags in circulation by purchasing and using these bags for your grocery shopping at only \$2. All proceeds go to conservation on St. Maarten.



This sea turtle program will include sea turtle population research, an impact assessment of coastal development and an awareness program. With the implementation of such a (hopefully sustainable) program, Nature Foundation tries to take another important step towards creating an island that still profits from the tourist industry but in a controlled and eco-friendly way. But remember it is up to all of us to ensure that there will always be a place for these magnificent sea turtles on our beaches and in our oceans!

Please contact your nearest Marine Park office if you would like more information on the status of sea turtles in the Windward Islands and what you can do to help them survive.

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Saba Conservation Foundation—tel: (599) 416-3295

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Happy Holidays



May Peace and
Joy be Yours
At This Holiday
Season and
Throughout the
New Year

**Best Wishes
From the Board & Staff
of**



Nature Foundation St. Maarten

"Preserving and Enhancing our Natural Environment"