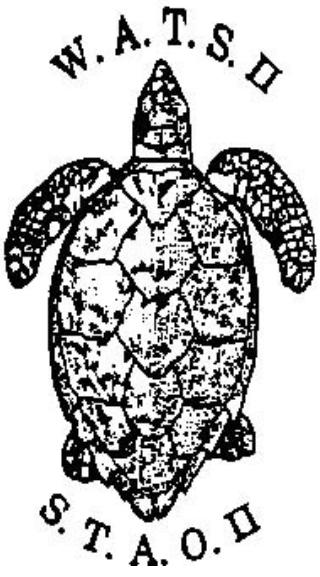
WATS II REPORT / DATA SET



Report for Marine Turtle Survey in Montserrat

1986 - 1987

John Jeffers

12 October 1987

WATS2 059

WIDECAST
Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network

With a grant from the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service, WIDECAST has digitized the databases and proceedings of the **Western Atlantic Turtle Symposium (WATS)** with the hope that the revitalized documents might provide a useful historical context for contemporary sea turtle management and conservation efforts in the Western Atlantic Region.

With the stated objective of serving "as a starting point for the identification of critical areas where it will be necessary to concentrate all efforts in the future", the first Western Atlantic Turtle Symposium convened in Costa Rica (17-22 July 1983), and the second in Puerto Rico four years later (12-16 October 1987). WATS I featured National Reports from 43 political jurisdictions; 37 presented at WATS II.

WATS I opened with these words: "The talks which we started today have the multiple purpose of bringing our knowledge up to date about the biological peculiarities of the marine turtle populations of the western Atlantic; to know and analyse the scope of the National Reports prepared by the scientific and technical personnel of more than thirty nations of the region; to consider options for the orderly management of marine turtle populations; and in general to provide an adequate forum for the exchange of experiences among scientists, administrators, and individuals interested in making contributions for the preservation of this important natural resource."

A quarter-century has passed, and the results of these historic meetings have been lost to science and to a new generation of managers and conservationists. Their unique importance in providing baseline data remains unrecognized, and their potential as a "starting point" is neither known nor appreciated.

The proceedings document what was known at the time concerning the status and distribution of nesting and foraging habitat, population sizes and trends, mortality factors, official statistics on exploitation and trade, estimated incidental catch, employment dependent on turtles, mariculture operations, public and private institutions concerned with conservation and use, legal aspects (e.g. regulations, enforcement, protected areas), and active research projects.

Despite the potential value of this information to agencies responsible for conducting stock assessments, monitoring recovery trends, safeguarding critical habitat, and evaluating conservation successes in the 21st century, the National Reports submitted to WATS II were not included in the published proceedings and, until now, have existed only in the private libraries of a handful of agencies and symposium participants. To help ensure the legacy of these symposia, we have digitized the entire proceedings – including National Reports, plenary presentations and panels, species synopses, and annotated bibliographies from both meetings – and posted them online at http://www.widecast.org/What/RegionalPrograms.html.

Each article has been scanned from the original document. Errors in the scan have been corrected; however, to be true to the original content (as closely as we can discern it), potential errors of content have not been corrected. This article can be cited (with the number of pages based on the layout of the original document) as:

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Karen L. Eckert
WIDECAST Executive Director
June 2009

REPORT FOR MARINE SEA TURTLE SURVEY IN MONTSERRAT: 1986-1987

Geography

Montserrat lies southwest of Antigua. It is a rugged volcanic island, 39½ square miles in area. It has a shoreline of approximately 49 km which is formed by steep cliffs and rocks. The only beach on its Windward side is immediately south of Blackburne airport. There are 11 main beaches on the island with 10 on the Leeward, or western, coast ranging from 0.1 to 1.4 km in length. All are of dark volcanic sand except for the northern-most, Rondevous Bay, which is composed of white coral sand.

Grass Beds

Seagrass beds are located off the northern and southern extremes of the island, around Brandsby Point and off the eastern section of the island. The costal shelf is very narrow and, as result, very few reefs are present.

Species Found in Montserrat

There are two known types of [marine] turtles nesting on Montserrat. These are the hawksbill and the green turtle. Both are year round residents and are found in a wide range of sizes. Adult green turtles reach very large sizes and weigh more than 300 lbs. There are also two (2) other species that are known to exist around our shoreline. These are the loggerhead and leatherback. These are mostly seen in the water. There is, however, a strong belief that the leatherback is nesting in Montserrat.

Nesting

There appears to be little nesting of marine turtles at a certain time of the year at certain beaches. This is due to the constant human activity on these beaches. The beaches are used for recreational purposes and by fishermen who store their boats because there are no natural harbours.

Nesting has been observed on the following beaches: Rondevous; Little Bay; Carr's Bay; Bunkum Bay; Woodlands Beach; Old Road Bay; Isles Bay; Lime Kiln; Foxes Bay; Barton Bay; Sugar Bay; and Kinsale.

From the information gathered through interviews, beach surveys, etc., it appears as if the green and hawksbill nest at the same beaches and at about the same time. Most nesting take place at Rendevous where the beach is less accessible. The other major nesting beaches are Bunkum Bay, Woodlands, Lime Kiln and Foxes Bay.

Method of Capturing Turtles

Turtles are captured for food and souvenirs. In the water they are captured by spear gun, gill net, turtle net, and while nesting when on shore. It must be noted that the Ministry responsible for Trade does not give any permission for any part of the turtle to be brought in or to be taken out of the island. Today there is only one turtle net operating on the island and there has been a dramatic decline in the availability of the carapaces offered for sale.

The loss and degradation of nesting habitat are also factors affecting turtle populations on Montserrat. Sand mining has also seriously affected nesting beaches and turtle nests.

Legislation

At present the legislation protects turtles for 3 months of the year along with their eggs. The penalty for breaking the law is US$18.00 or EC$48.00. This legislation is to be amended to include the following:

1. An increase in the minimum permitted weight from 15 to 30 lbs

2. Extended closed season from 3 months to 6 months

3. To make the removal of any turtle egg or interference with a turtle nest an offence

4. To make it illegal to interfere with a turtle while on land except for research purposes

5. To make it illegal for anyone to bring in or carry out any part of the turtle

6. An increase in the penalty from EC$40.00 to EC$500.00

   In addition to the aforementioned, a moratorium would be considered for the taking of marine turtles.

7. To have certain beaches reserved for the nesting of turtles thereby making the removal of sand illegal at such beaches.

Turtles Captured for Consumption

In 1986, nine (9) turtles were recorded captured; 5 from Carr's Bay; 3 from Plymouth and 1 from Foxes Bay. However, based on other reports, as many as 15 might have been caught intentionally. At least 2 females were caught and on both occasions they had eggs. See Appendix II[1]. There were some incidental catches of turtles by means of the gill nets during the period under review which resulted in some juveniles being taken.

Beach Erosion

1987 was a very bad year for the nesting of marine see turtles. Almost all of the beaches were seriously affected by heavy rains during the early part of the year which resulted in large quantities of sand being removed from the beaches and the creation of large ponds on several beaches. In addition the coastline was severely damaged, making it almost impossible for turtles to nest. At two beaches in particular, the beaches had to be cleared by heavy equipment.

Sand mining also contributed to the decimation of nesting beaches. As a result, tighter controls were put on sand mining in 1987.

Tagging of Turtles

Tagging of turtles commenced in 1987. On 29th January 1987, 11 turtles were tagged. On one occasion one of the turtles tagged 4 weeks earlier was recaptured 7 miles away from where it was released, and it showed an increase in body weight of half a pound. See Appendix III[1] for further details.

Observing the Closed Season

There are still problems regarding the closed season. On one occasion an offender was found with 30 fully mature eggs and 254 immature eggs. The eggs were seized and the offender

[1] *Editor's note (2009):* Neither Appendix II nor Appendix III could be located.

reprimanded for being in possession of the eggs. He wasn't prosecuted because of the low penalty of EC$48.00 or US$18.00.

In order to achieve a higher level of success, a series of educational programs took place by means of the following:

1. Several radio programmes were carried [out] on the turtle population, the industry, its importance, and the reason for WATS II. This was done over a period of 4 weeks using the weekly agricultural programme.

2. The official "Farm News" bulletin for the Department of Agriculture was also used to educate the public.

3. Posters were placed at strategic places to create an awareness.

4. Informing groups, including the Fisheries Cooperative.

5. The involvement of turtle fishermen.

It was a real encouragement to work alongside the leading turtle fishermen on the island who took it on with such enthusiasm that he later convinced his colleagues to refrain from catching the female turtles. Mr. Phillip Menzies used his time to get some of the female turtles tagged. This he did free of cost and he has promised to continue tagging the female turtles after the closed season. His hard work helped to make the survey the success it was.

Appendix I

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- Mr. James Brown
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- Mr. James Cabey
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  Montserrat, W.I.
- Mr. William Kelley
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- Mr. John Layne
  Davy Hill
  St. John's
  Montserrat, W.I.
- Mr. Wayne Lee
  Parsons Road
  Plymouth
  Montserrat, W.I.
- Mr. Phillip Menzies
  Fairfield
  Plymouth
  Montserrat, W.I.
- Montserrat National Trust
  Plymouth
  Montserrat, W.I.

WATS II REPORT/DATA SET

Report for Marine Sea Trutle Survey in Montserrat
1986-1987

John Jeffers

12 October 1987

WATS2 059

REPORT ON MARINE SEA TURTLE SURVEY IN MONTSERRAT - 1986-1987.

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APPENDIX I

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