



# A Brief History of Turtle Conservation Efforts in Tobago



TOBAGO W.I.



Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network

# SOS Tobago – Who We Are



TOBAGO W.I.



- We are a community based organization (CBO), formed in 2000 in response to widespread poaching on nesting beaches.

- OUR MISSION:

“To conserve our local sea turtles and their coastal and marine habitat through community based initiatives in Research, Education and Eco-tourism.”

# Historical Context

- Field Naturalists and Forestry Division conducted intermittent patrols and tagging exercises in the 80s and early 90s focused mainly on leatherbacks.
- Seasonal beachfront resident, Wendy Herron, began patrolling in the 90s and reached out to the Forestry Division, THA, local tour guides and WIDECAST for support in response to widespread poaching on Great Courland Bay aka Turtle Beach.
- SOS Tobago (SOS) was formed initially as a project of Environment TOBAGO (ET) in 2000 and registered as it's own entity in 2001 with support of the THA & ET.

# SOS Tobago - What We Do




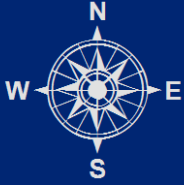
**RESEARCH:** Nightly and daytime patrols on nesting beaches; Turtle Beach, Grafton and Mt. Irvine Back Bay (leatherback index beaches) and Lambeau - Magdalena (hawksbills).

**EDUCATION:** Education, awareness, outreach e.g. Family Field Trip program, collaborations with local media and vibrant FB community.

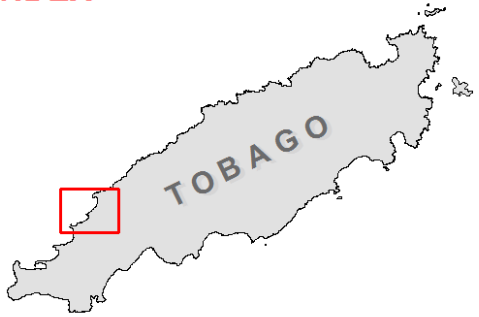
**ECO-TOURISM:** Turtle watching guidelines, tour guide training and ongoing collaboration with the Division of Tourism and Transportation

# Key milestones

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- 2000 SOS was formed and regular community beach patrols began at Courland Bay, Grafton and Mt. Irvine Back Bay .
  - 2001-4 Volunteer nightly patrols and day checks on original index beaches gradually expanded to Charlotteville eventually leading to the formation of NEST. Family Field Trip and Tour Guide Training programs established.
  - 2005 -7 Leatherback tagging initiated on original index beaches. Limited patrols expanded to encompass additional beaches and hawksbill tagging initiated
  - 2008-11 SOS & NEST monitoring efforts expand as funding increased; including consistent nest excavations on Courland Bay
  - 2011-12 Patrols expanded to encompass additional beaches and new groups with support of the Green Fund through Turtle Village Trust (TVT) and DNRE, THA.
  - 2013 Monitoring programme expanded to include Lambeau beach (0.25km) and training carried out for new groups throughout the island.
  - 2014-17 Monitoring continued at original index beaches and Lambeau Beach marking 10 years of consistent nesting season monitoring at Courland Bay



**INDEX**



**Turtle Beach**

**Grafton Beach**

**Mt. Irvine  
Back Bay**

PLYMOUTH

ADVENTURE

COURLAND

PLYMOUTH ROAD

BLACK ROCK

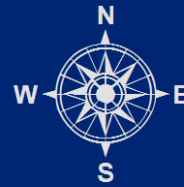
MT IRVINE

ORANGE HILL

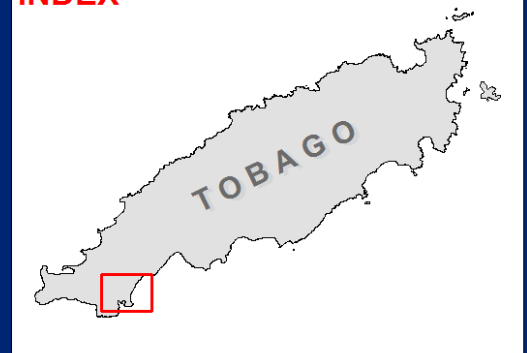
0 250 500 1,000 1,500 Metres

ALL FIELDS

LOWLANDS



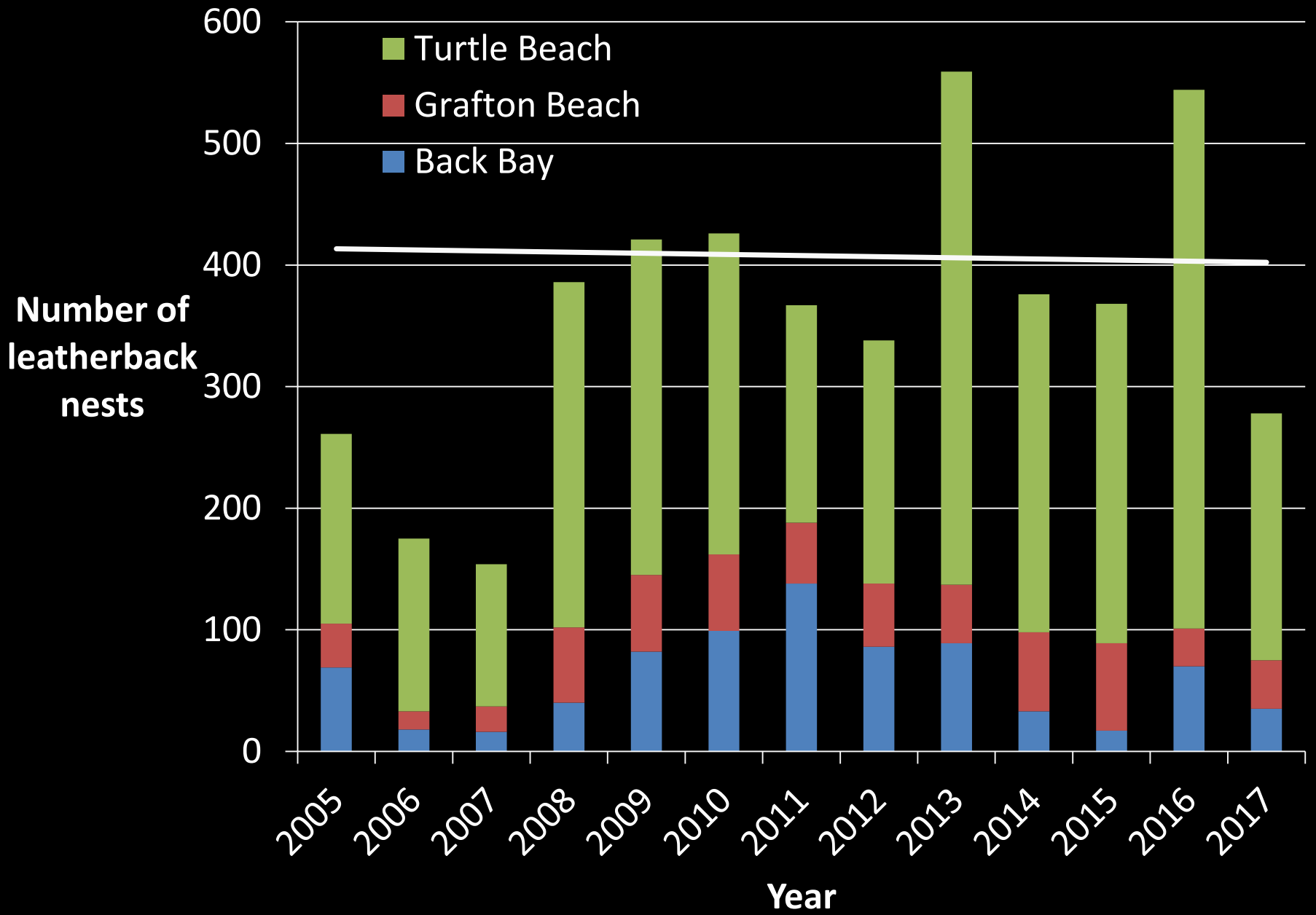
**INDEX**



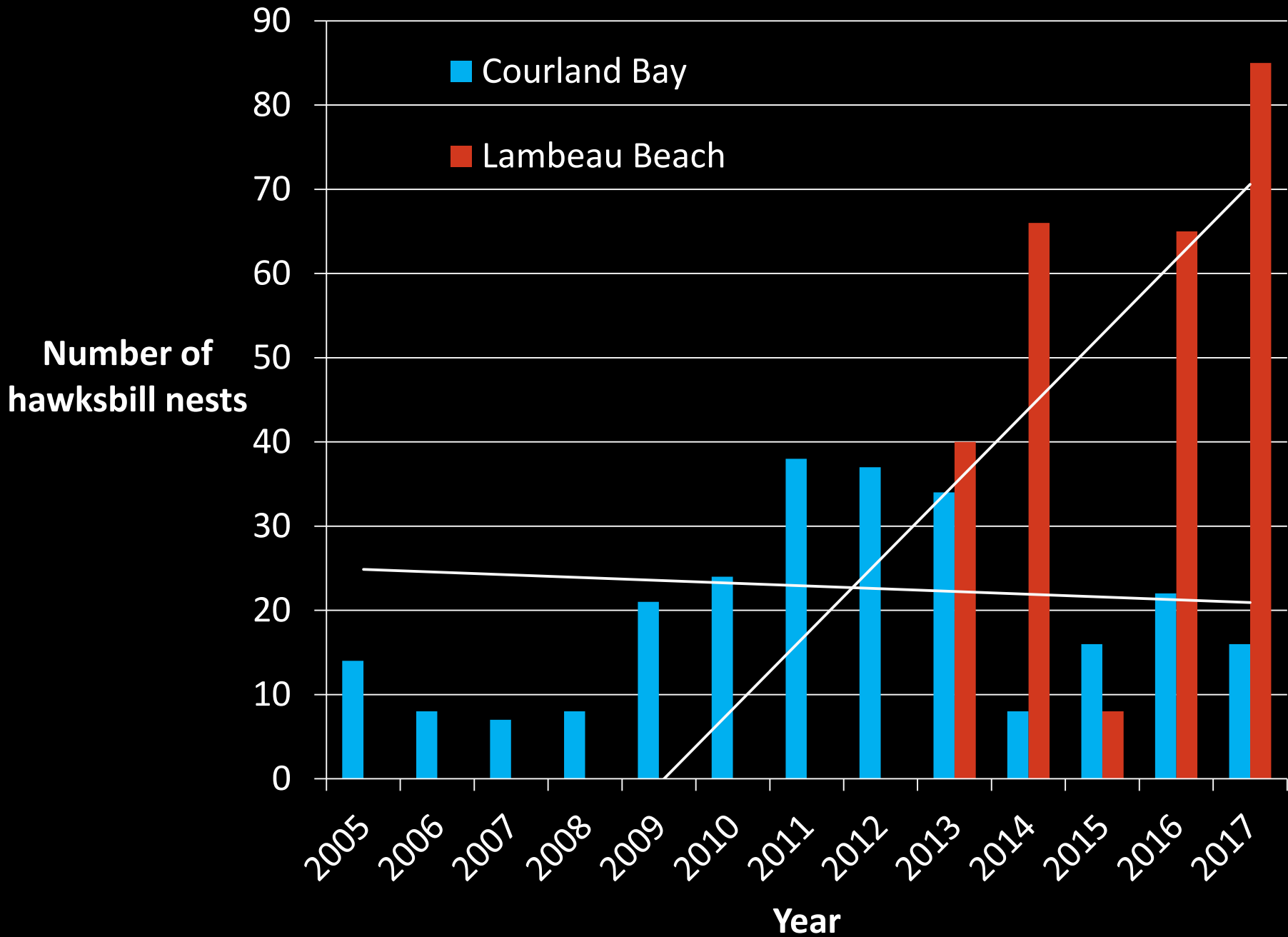
**Lambeau Beach  
(Magdalena Grand)**

0 100 200 400 600 Metres

A horizontal scale bar with vertical tick marks at 0, 100, 200, 400, and 600 metres.







# Hatch success

Year	Leatherbacks		Hawksbills	
	Number of nests excavated	Mean hatch success (%)	Number of nests excavated	Mean hatch success (%)
2009	27	48	-	-
2010	117	48	-	-
2011	155	59	-	-
2012	184	58	-	-
2013	149	60	31	86
2014	81	61	63	87
2015	42	61	14	84
2016	82	57	63	83
2017	208	64	89	83

$$\text{Hatching success} = \frac{\text{hatched shells}}{\text{total yolked eggs}} \times 100$$

# Hatchling release at Magdalena Grand



Leatherback at Turtle Beach



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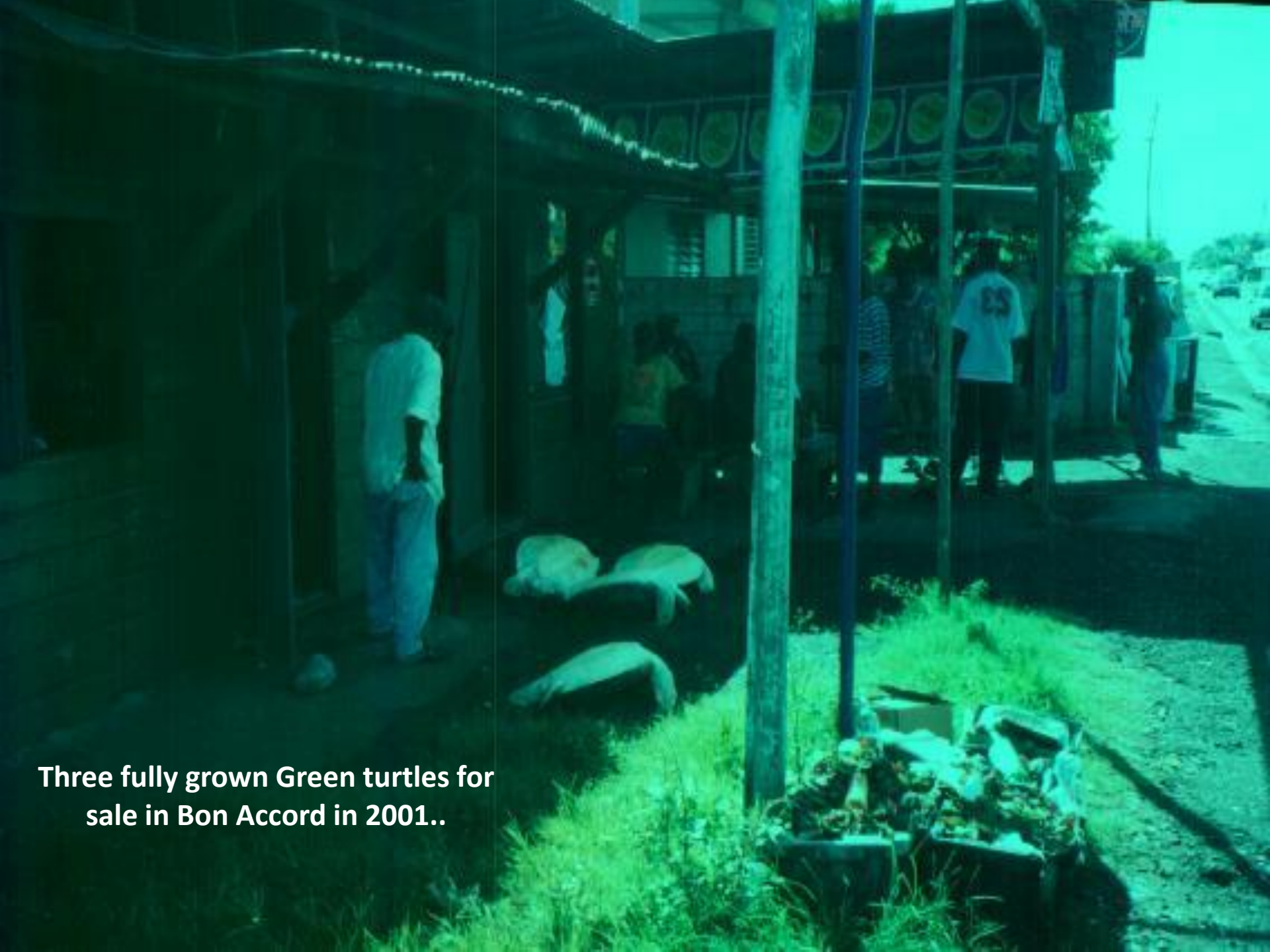


# Challenges, Successes and Lessons Learnt Along The Way



# Intentional and Incidental Capture





**Three fully grown Green turtles for sale in Bon Accord in 2001..**



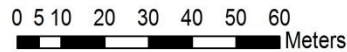
The turtle 'graveyard' in L'Anse Fourmi.



## Coastal lighting and disorientation



# LOCATION AND RANK OF LIGHTS AT REX RESORTS TURTLE BEACH HOTEL





**Coastal development,  
irresponsible recreational  
beach use and sea level rise**



# Key Successes

- Dramatic reduction in poaching in the Courland Bay area; still a major problem on more isolated beaches around the island.
- Over a decade of leatherback tagging in the Courland Bay area, significant hawksbill monitoring offshore and at key nesting beaches around island.
- Overwhelmingly positive changes in general awareness, perception and attitudes from 2000 – present.
- Signature programs: Family Field Trip and Tour Guide Training programs, guesthouse/volunteer placement, hatchling release events at Lambeau and a vibrant FB community spearheaded by our programme coordinator, Gian



## Key Lessons Learnt 2000-2018

- Patrol funding won't fix everything
- International volunteers are great but it's complicated
- Social media is incredibly helpful but it's just one way to tell a story – likes are not the same as real action in service of what we love. Engagement online not the same as engagement in real life.
- Never underestimate / undervalue the power of story and networks – the backbone of successful community based projects.











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