

# Sea Turtle Conservation: The Nevisian Experience

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# Sea Turtle Conservation: The Nevisian Experience

- Early attempts were made sometime in the 1970's to assess the status of sea turtles on Nevis. This involved Drs. Anne and Peter Meylan. WIDECAST produced the *Sea Turtle Recovery Action Plan for St. Kitts and Nevis* in 1992. Although there was general knowledge that sea turtles nested on the beaches of the island and that they foraged in our waters, there was no monitoring done.
- In 2001, Lemuel Pemberton returned to Nevis from Barbados where he had undergone the Natural Resource Management Programme. One of the courses that he was enrolled in was one on sea turtle conservation. One day he noticed a fresh hawksbill sea turtle nest at Garling Bay on the south Coast of Nevis.

# The Beginning

- This sea turtle nest was the first one officially monitored on the island. The hatching success was low but this inspired Pemberton to investigate whether or not the number of turtles nesting on the island was large enough to merit a sea turtle monitoring programme. At the time Pemberton was working at the Department of Fisheries and so was able to integrate sea turtle monitoring into his work plan, especially as the Director of Fisheries, Mr. Arthur Anslyn, was also the WIDECAST Country Coordinator for Nevis at that time.

# The Early Years

- 2002, day patrols of beaches in order to verify the beaches where most turtles nest
- 2003, commencement of night patrols: 12 turtles tagged, Nevis Turtle Group (NTG) formed
- 2004, the government sends an intern to work with the NTG: 24 turtles tagged (leatherbacks, greens and hawksbills nest on Nevis)
- 2006-2008, satellite transmitters attached to turtles: some reach as far as Nicaragua

# Hurricane impacts

- Hurricanes destroy almost 100 percent of nests on west coast beaches. Beaches on the north coast suffer less damage
- Hurricane Ivan
- Hurricane Omar 2008
- Tropical Storm Earl (around 2010)
- Irma and Maria (2016)

# 2014-2017

- Increased numbers of nesting turtles observed except leatherbacks
- Over 50 turtles encountered in those years
- Increased number of tourists going turtle watching with the NTG
- New volunteers recruited by the NTG

# Challenges

- Removal of coastal vegetation
- Light pollution
- Increased beach erosion
- Mongoose predation of turtle eggs
- Predation of eggs by dogs
- Poaching
- Securing funding for sea turtle conservation
- High turnover of volunteers

# Successes

- Increased public awareness in respect to sea turtle conservation
- Development of a sea turtle ecotourism product
- Involvement of local fishers in conservation
- Recruitment of school children as volunteers
- Satellite tracking of nesting turtles
- Involvement of the largest hotel on the island in the sea turtle conservation project