

SATELLITE TRACKING IN THE WINDWARD ISLANDS OF THE NETHERLANDS ANTILLES

By

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Satellite telemetry has become a common tool for turtle biologists to discover migration pathways between nesting beaches and feeding grounds. It facilitates a greater understanding of their geographical range and habitat utilisation, allowing improved protection and focused conservation efforts in essential habitats. Tracking projects can also be used to great advantage in community awareness programmes, by highlighting turtles' migratory behaviour to engage the public in conservation issues.

Following the hugely successful public outreach programme conducted by Sea Turtle Conservation Bonaire, the Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance (DCNA) initiated a satellite tracking project on the Windward Islands of St Eustatius and St Maarten.

The DCNA is a newly created foundation that brings together the nature conservation management organisations of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba. Their main goal is to preserve biodiversity on the islands by ensuring adequate protection and effective management of natural resources through the establishment of sustainable funding sources.

This project was an inter-island collaboration of St Eustatius National Parks (STENAPA) and the Nature Foundation St Maarten, and was the first tracking study to be carried out in the Windward Islands. Two adult females had transmitters attached; the hawksbill from St Maarten showed typical migratory behaviour while data from the green turtle from St Eustatius suggest that she may be resident there year-round. This would be the first time such behaviour has been observed in a breeding female.

In addition to the biological research, this project also incorporated an extensive education and outreach campaign in the local communities. On both islands amongst others an art and essay

contest involved the schools. The community was kept up to date with regular updates in the newspapers.