

Antigua Sea Turtle Project Update

PRESS RELEASE

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Barbudans Trained in Monitoring Endangered Sea Turtles

Members of the Barbuda Fisheries Department and Codrington Lagoon National Park recently completed a three-day training workshop on sea turtle research and conservation methods. The workshop was facilitated by the Antigua Sea Turtle Project (ASTP) and Jumby Bay Hawksbill Project (JBHP), with support from the Codrington Lagoon National Park and the Waitt Foundation Rapid Ocean Conservation (ROC) grant program.

The course was held from June 8-10th, 2015 and engaged twelve Barbuda personnel in learning about basic sea turtle nesting biology and field methods for collecting data on endangered Hawksbill, Green, and Leatherback turtles, all of which nest on the shoreline of Barbuda. Following classroom briefings and five field sessions that included an initial survey of nesting activity on Barbuda's west coast beaches, the participants were trained and equipped to continue monitoring nesting beaches through the remainder of the hawksbill nesting season, which runs until late November.

Dr. Seth Stapleton of the JBHP noted that "the interest and enthusiasm was very impressive, and there's a strong base from which to develop a monitoring program in Barbuda." Although the course was planned for ten participants and strenuous field work extended late into the evenings and early mornings, fifteen people participated in the final patrol. "There was a clear sense of pride from the Barbudans, recognizing that these beaches are important sites for turtle nesting, and there was excitement that they might have the opportunity to quantify this using scientific methods" added Clovis Fuller. Dr. Stapleton also noted that the participants were "very adept at identifying tracks and nests, and accurately recording the data".

For years, anecdotal information on Barbuda's beaches has suggested high levels of sea turtle nesting activity. Clovis Fuller says that the workshop was a first step in developing the capacity on-island to regularly monitor nesting sites, something that can benefit the turtles and local residents. "In the short term, we hope that the research will lead to a better understanding of how turtles use the coastline of Barbuda and will help to share the importance of marine turtle conservation. Sea turtles are tremendously charismatic creatures, and a well-managed turtle

population can be the foundation of a thriving ecotourism and turtle watching program in the longer term.”

The training team is excited that Barbuda may be one step closer to a win-win for marine turtles, oceans, and people. Several follow-up activities are planned including a training exchange to Antigua and the Jumby Bay Hawksbill Project, a mentoring visit to Barbuda in August, and a proposal plan for future sea turtle monitoring on the island.



The morning patrol on June 9, 2015, included a foot patrol along the beaches adjacent to the southern portions of Codrington Lagoon, and a boat patrol of the beaches on the northwestern coast.



Foot patrolling on Wednesday, June 10 included 15 course participants and instructors.



Suspected nesting site of a leatherback sea turtle, observed the morning of Wednesday, June 10 on Low Bay.



Seth Stapleton guiding Fisheries personnel through the data recording process



Training team returning to Codrington by boat on June 10th, 2015