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Saving the Sea Turtles of Anguilla: combining community action with scientific evidence to drive legislative change

Targeted territory: Anguilla

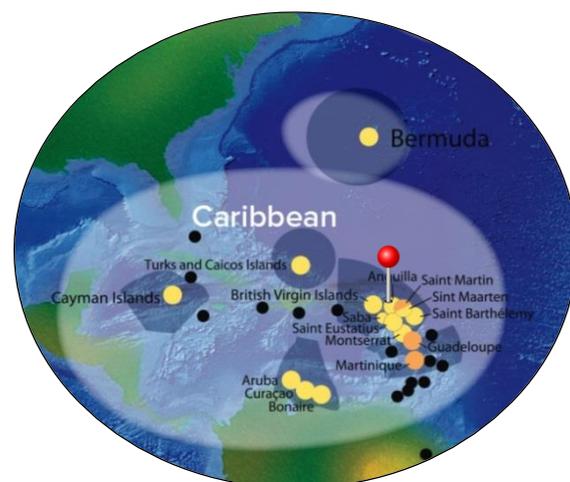
Total project budget: 438,238 Euros

BEST 2.0 grant awarded: 394,976 Euros

Duration: May 2016 – April 2019 (36 months)

Lead organisation: Government of Anguilla,
Department of Fisheries and Marine Resources

Partner organisations: Anguilla National Trust;
University of Roehampton



Background:

Four species of sea turtle forage and nest in Anguilla – the globally threatened¹ Hawksbill (CR), Green (EN), Leatherback (CR), and less-frequently, the Loggerhead (EN). These species rely on the island’s coral reefs, seagrass beds, beaches and coastal vegetation to support their foraging and nesting behaviour and for Anguilla, whose main tourism draw is its beaches, protecting the integrity of this habitat for sea turtles also means protecting the most significant indirect contributor to the island’s GDP.

After hundreds of years of overexploitation the Caribbean’s sea turtle population size and range has severely decreased. In recognition of this severe decline and in an effort to assist with population

¹ The status of the species on the IUCN Red List is indicated in brackets (CR = Critical, EN = Endangered)

recovery, the Government of Anguilla established a five-year moratorium on sea turtle harvesting in 1995, which has since been extended to 2020. Yet the major problem is that direct evidence about changes in sea turtle populations in the Caribbean over time remains woefully limited.

Description of the Project:

This project seeks to address the current dearth of vital data about sea turtles in order to inform management and conservation on and around Anguilla. Data will be gathered using a capture-tag-and-release methodology and used to identify important foraging and nesting sites. Threats to sea turtles will be assessed and mitigation plan developed. On the basis of the information generated by the



project and stakeholder consultations, an Anguilla Sea Turtle Recovery Action Plan will be completed. The project will also train individuals from Anguilla on the biology and conservation of sea turtles, sea turtle tracking and monitoring and marine spatial planning and data analysis. It will also develop a sea turtle eco-tour guide certification programme and certify at least twenty individuals, including local fishers, as sea turtle eco-tour guides. A communications component will promote the need for sea turtle conservation.

This project is very timely; with the sea turtle moratorium set to end in 2020 and

with policy makers for the Government of Anguilla willing to engage in open dialogue with natural resource managers, fishers, and other stakeholders, it offers an opportunity to inform meaningful conservation action based on scientific evidence while also addressing the impact on the livelihoods and cultural heritage of local people who may be affected by such conservation measures.

Intended results:

- Areas and population status of foraging sea turtles and breeding sea turtles are identified and assessed.
- Potential threats to sea turtle populations are identified and possible mitigation strategies formulated.
- A framework and supporting structures for guiding sea turtle conservation action and recovery are established.
- Increased technical expertise within Anguilla on sea turtle conservation and research.
- Increased national and international awareness and support for sea turtle and coastal conservation.

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