

Project Update May 2008

On Saturday May 3rd 2008 the Nevis Turtle Group (NTG) and the Department of Fisheries organized a cleanup of two of the major nesting beaches of Nevis. The NTG was aided by a group of young persons from the Legacy International Church Youth Group led by Messrs. Everson Walters and Vernon Mills. The Nevis Solid Waste Management Authority is aiding with the disposal of this garbage at the landfill facility at Long Point. The aim of this cleanup effort was to welcome back the sea turtles of Nevis to clean beaches for the 2008 nesting season.

The cleanup effort started just before 7am at the eastern end of Seahaven or Lovers Beach. A variety of litter was found along the beach but the predominant materials picked up were plastic and glass bottles. One discarded toilet set was found among the seagrass at the western end of the beach as were a number of empty cardboard cartons and bits of galvanized sheeting. Most if not all of the garbage appeared to be of local origin. Some of it had obviously been left behind by beach users while the nature of some of the materials leads one to believe that a number of persons may be using the area as a dumpsite.

A cleanup of Jones Bay Beach followed the cleanup of Lovers Beach. More garbage was found at this site than had been anticipated. This may be due to the ongoing construction work in the area. Discarded construction material, plastic and glass bottles were the main items found here. Again most if not all of the garbage found on the beach area was of local origin. Residents and visitors alike should take more care of our beaches and not use them as dumpsites.

It is yet early in the nesting season with about ten clutches of eggs been laid so far – most of them by leatherback turtles. One clutch of hawksbill eggs have hatched with a 99 percent success rate. It is hoped that similar success rates will be observed throughout the season as the NTG helps these critically endangered sea turtles to survive.

Nevis Turtle Group Confirms Leatherback Sea Turtle Nesting on South Coast

On Monday 12 May 2008 Nevis Turtle Group president, Lemuel Pemberton conducted a morning survey of beaches on the south coast of Nevis. This is rough country – accessible only on foot. In some areas hundred foot cliffs soar above an angry sea. A fall from these cliffs could be fatal – one needs to tread carefully.

Last year what appeared to be leatherback tracks were observed at Coccolaba Bay. However, they were unclear. On this day however, leatherback tracks were clearly seen on this pocket beach – perhaps the most remote in the country. Nesting frequency does not appear to be great enough to warrant night patrols of the beach so it may be a while before a Coccolaba Bay Beach leatherback turtle is tagged. Leatherback nesting has also

been confirmed at Garling Bay, Stock Pen Estate and most recently (May 17th 2008) at Black Bay.

Guadeloupe leatherback nests on Nevis

On the night of Friday May 23rd 2008 the Nevis Turtle Group (NTG) and friends conducted a patrol of Seahaven or Lovers Beach. The first turtle to be encountered was a critically endangered hawksbill turtle. This sea turtle nested under the seagrape trees as such turtles are wont to do. One group stayed with this turtle while another group walked further down the beach to see whether other turtles were nesting on that night.

An untagged leatherback was discovered digging its body pit further down the beach. By the time both turtles had nested and were tagged it was after midnight. It was decided to make one further sortie down the beach to see if any other turtles were nesting on that night (it is unusual to find more than two turtles nesting on one beach in Nevis this early in the season.). It was at this point that the turtle that had previously been tagged in Guadeloupe was encountered. It had attached to it tags FWI 4442 and FWI 4443. It was only after WH 3218 was attached by the NTG that it was realized that the over 1000lbs in weight leatherback had already been tagged.

This incident further drives home the point that the Caribbean territories share the stock of marine organisms found in our waters. Leatherback sea turtles are less faithful to a nesting beach than hawksbills and greens that would almost always go back to nest on the beach they were born. They may nest on beaches far away from where they previously nested. Thus there is a need for regional management of our marine resources.

The Nevis Turtle Group is being assisted in its conservation efforts in 2008 by the Rufford Small Grants (RSG) Foundation. Their grant of £5000 has already led to the NTG confirming leatherback nesting on the south coast of Nevis and to it been able to encounter more leatherbacks on the beach in 2008 than in any other year. The NTG extends its heartiest thanks to the RSG Foundation and to Mr. John Guilbert of the Nevis Historical and Conservation Society, Mr. Samuel Powell of the Department of Cooperatives on Nevis and to Karen Eckert of the Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network for their support.

South Coast Secrets: the other side of Nevis

The south coast of Nevis is largely inaccessible by vehicle. For the most part there are no trails and access is only possible along the beach. Trails that once existed have either been overgrown or where they existed along cliff tops they have long collapsed into the sea. Hurricanes such as Hugo, Luis, Marilyn, George and Lenny have ravaged the coastline making it stark and uninviting in some ways yet breathtakingly beautiful in others. Acacia and cactus thorn scrub along with sisal dominate the vegetation. This is

the semi-desert area of Nevis. Those who traverse the area must tread carefully and take much drinking water with them. A careless step can result in one tumbling over 100 feet on the unforgiving salt-encrusted rocks below. Temperatures soar as the merciless sun arcs across the sky and one can easily get dehydrated.

Your reward for been venturesome is great: a quiet beach, not another human in sight and an opportunity to be truly alone on what is fast becoming a more crowded island. However, it is best to travel with another person to such an inaccessible area. This is even clearer as you stumble across the carcass of an incautious goat that has tumbled from the soaring cliffs.



Well at Coccolaba Bay



Popeshead cactus near cliff top



Cliffs over 100 feet high