

Peter Robin Bacon

" The architect of the Turtle Conservation Laws"

I first met Peter Bacon in 1964 when he became a member of the then Trinidad Field Naturalists' Club. Peter had arrived in Trinidad in August 1963 accompanied by his Trinidad-born wife Tyra, whom he had married in England in July 1962.

He soon made his presence felt in the Club and he was elected to the post of Honorary Assistant Secretary in 1965. He served in the post of Vice-President from 1966 to 1968 and was elected President of the Club in 1969, a position which he held for three consecutive years. From 1972 to 1980, he was a member of the Club's Editorial Committee and continued to serve the Club until his departure for the University of Calabar in Nigeria.

In 1963, the Club had received a report that during the annual nesting season large numbers of Leatherback turtles were being slaughtered on the beach at Matura. In addition, once slaughtered the carcass was pushed out to sea by a different group of persons, not being the poachers, and at first light the many sharks which were attracted to the carcass, were shot.

On the Club's first visit to Matura, on a night in mid- 1964, having not previously reconnoitered the area in daylight, we were unable to locate the turn-off to the beach from Orosco Road and most of our party, including a large number of UWI students who had been invited by Peter, left in frustration. However some of us stragglers met a villager who directed us to the northern end of the beach now popularly called Rincon where we saw our first Leatherback turtle on the beach. Additional trips were made to the Matura Beach during the later months of 1964.

Then in 1965, the Trinidad Field Naturalists' Club commenced a Turtle-watching Project with Peter Bacon as the co-ordinator. At that time the exact nesting period for sea turtles in Trinidad and Tobago was unknown to the Club and there were many "folk-tales and myths" to contend with. Beach patrols were made not only at Matura but also at Las Cuevas where Mr. Eric Laforest often accompanied by Ms. Luisa Zuniaga and other friends visited regularly.

During the next five years, turtle catch information was obtained from the Fisheries Division for turtles landed at the Toco and Mayaro Fishing Depots and offered for sale at various market-places, and by 1969 a reasonably accurate nesting pattern was also discerned from the information collected by the Club during its five years of beach patrolling.

Also in 1969, Peter became the first PhD graduate in Zoology from the St. Augustine Campus of the University of the West Indies.

During the Turtle nesting season of 1970 the Club began a Turtle Tagging Project using equipment supplied by the University of Florida ,and by 1980, 330 Leatherback turtles had been tagged. The information on each turtle was recorded on information sheets designed by Peter. Beaches visited included Matura, Fishing Pond, Las Cuevas, Big Bay at Toco,Grand Riviere,Tacarib and Grafton and Turtle Beach in Tobago.

In 1973, Peter on behalf of the Field Naturalists' Club, prepared a document containing recommendations for the amendment to the existing Turtle Conservation Laws. These recommendations were submitted to the Ministry of Agriculture , Lands and Fisheries and follow-up meetings were held with the then Minister, the Honorable Lionel Robinson and with other Government Officials. At these meetings ,the Club was represented by Mr.G.E.L Laforest, it's President, Dr. Peter R.Bacon and Mr.Ian Lambie, the Honorary Secretary.

Articles and photographs depicting the slaughter of turtles on the Matura beach together with letters to the editors of the daily newspapers , calling for the amendments to the existing laws, in order to better protect the nesting turtles on our beaches, were regularly published.and resulted in the issue of the Turtle and Turtle Eggs Regulations of 1975 . (Act 23 of 1975 issued as Government Notice No.1 19 of 8th September 1975) which included all the recommendations submitted by the Club. A memorable victory had been achieved by the Club.

Today we will like to believe that the early conservation work by the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club under the guidance of Peter Bacon has resulted in a general awareness of the plight of sea turtles and the need for sound management of this very valuable natural resource. We like to believe also that this early work has resulted in the birth of organisations such as Nature Seekers in Matura and other Turtle Conservation groups in Grande Riviere, Fishing Pond and in other parts of Trinidad and in Tobago.

Peter served as a member of the Board of Management of the Asa Wright Nature Centre from 1971 to 1973.

He has made a significant contribution not only to academia but also to Environmental and Wildlife Conservation in Trinidad and Tobago , for which we are very grateful

On Monday 24th February,2003, Professor Peter Robin Bacon passed away at the age of 64 years after a long period of illness.

The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club, the University of the West Indies and the Country are all the poorer and we all mourn his passing.

MAY HE REST IN PEACE.

9th March,2003

Ian Lambie