

# Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club

## Turtle Project 1963 to 1980

**1963** - The Club investigates a report that large numbers of Leatherback Turtles were being slaughtered on the Matura Beach when they come to lay.

**1964** - During the months of May and June ,and at full moon, the Club conducted beach patrols at Matura Beach. A few live turtles were seen but many carcasses in various stages of decomposition were also on the beach. (*At that time legend had it that the turtles emerged from the sea at the full moon.*)

**1965** - The Club organized regular beach patrols at Matura. Most of these patrols were made at the full moon and also on Friday and Saturday nights. Since most of the Club's members who participated in these patrols lived at St.Augustine, Port-of-Spain and as far west as Diego Martin it was inconvenient to return home from Matura Beach ,during the work- week.

**1966 - and beyond.** - More frequent visits were made to Matura Beach , occasionally during the daytime(by Peter Bacon) to view any evidence of turtle nesting activity on the beach. Visits were also made to the beaches at Fishing Pond , Las Cuevas, Big Bay at Toco, and Grand Riviere in Trinidad and to Grafton (Stone Haven Bay) , Turtle Beach (Courland Bay), Speyside and Bloody Bay in Tobago where evidence of turtle nesting activity was seen.

During this period, basic information on Leatherback Turtles was obtained from Dr.Hendrickson of the University of Malaysia , where research , including the relocation of eggs, was being conducted at Trengganu Beach, Malaysia, for many years. Dr. Bacon also obtained information on the turtle catches during the open season from various Fish Depots in Trinidad. The species captured and offered for sale were Hawksbill, Loggerhead and Green Turtles. Later the Club occasionally encountered Ridley Turtles nesting at Matura..

**1970** - In May 1970, the Club began a Turtle Project with equipment supplied by the University of Florida at Gainsville. This Project came to an end in May 1980 by which time 330 Leatherback Turtles had been tagged. During the period other turtle species were encountered on the beaches.

**1973** - In May 1973 the Club presented a report prepared by Dr.Bacon entitled "*The Status of Sea Turtles in Trinidad and Tobago*" to the Honorable Minister of Agriculture , Lands and Fisheries. In subsequent meetings with the Club's representatives, Mr.G.E.L.Laforest, the President, Mr.Ian Lambie,the Honorary Secretary and Dr.Peter Bacon the Project Coordinator , the Minister agreed to propose the amendment of the existing Turtle Laws which the Club demonstrated were inadequate.

Act No.23 of 1975 ,issued as Government Notice No.119 of the 8<sup>th</sup> September, 1975 , "*The Turtle and Turtle Eggs Regulations*" was issued.

**1980** - In May 1980, the Club's Turtle Project was terminated after seventeen (17) years of continuous Beach Patrols during the Annual Turtle Nesting Season

## Some Notes

During these seventeen years the Club invited Secondary Schools students to participate in Beach Patrols.

Peter Bacon and Ian Lambie also visited Secondary Schools , including N.E. College in Sangre Grande , to stimulate an interest among the students in the need to Protect the Nesting Leatherback Turtles.

Articles were published in International Turtle Conservation Magazines , in the Club's Journal, in the Naturalist Magazine and in the local newspapers.

During the State of Emergency in 1970, passes were obtained for selected Club Members' vehicles to transit between Matura and Port-of-Spain during the Curfew hours. We were stopped by the Police on more than one occasion at Waller Field.

Some of the regular participants in Beach Patrols and in Turtle Tagging were G.E.L.Laforest (Deceased) who frequently visited the Las Cuevas Beach., Ms.Luisa Zuniaga , David Rooks, John Correia, Ishmael Samad , David Lee-a-Ping and of course Ian Lambie and the late Dr.Peter Bacon. There are others whom I do not readily remember.

During the Nesting Season of 1975, David Rooks spent week-ends with his family at Tacarib Beach. On one occasion we recorded 18 Nesting Leatherbacks Turtles on Grand Tacarib. At that time it was a "Club Record".

On one occasion when the Club was visiting Matura, Ishmael Samad confronted a group of poachers who were armed with cutlasses and about to kill a leatherback turtle. I leave it for him to tell his story about this incident.

Mr.Etienne Majani (Deceased) made his house at Little Tacarib Bay available for use as an overnight facility by visiting Club members.

The boatman who transported Club members from Blanchisseuse to Tacarib Bay in his fishing pirogue was Ruben Mulligan (now deceased) He was recommended to us by Yves Guillaume, a Club member resident in Blanchisseuse...

The Manager of the coconut estate at Tacarib was Pedrito Marcano who was always very hospitable to visiting Club Members.

On one occasion, due to rough seas, members were unable to board Rubens boat for the trip back to Blanchisseuse, where the cars were parked at the Police Station. The group had to hike to Paria Bay. Once there, we discovered that a female member was pregnant. Thank God she did not experience any problems as a result.

I am sure that John Correia, Ishmael Samad and Louisa Zuniaga have their own experiences to relate..

*Ian Lambie*