

THE LEATHERBACK TURTLE PROJECT
(Progress report 1967-68, and recommendations.)
 by **Peter R. Bacon**

The Leatherback Turtle study, reported on in the previous journal, was continued during 1967 and 1968 by visits to a number of beaches, particularly on the north and east coasts. The following are the records submitted to the club. Many more carcasses were seen by members but as exact details were not supplied these are not included here. The names of the beaches visited are omitted, because it was thought undesirable to give the nesting areas too much publicity, although these are available in the club's records.

DATE.	COAST.	TURTLE RECORD. (<i>Dermochelys Coriacea</i>)
1967.		
19 May.	East	3 fresh nests.
20 "	"	1 laying.
28 "	"	1 carcass, and destroyed eggs.
17 June.	North.	1 fresh nest.
22 "	East.	1 laying.
23 "	"	1 fresh nest.
24 Sept.	South.	2 sets fresh skeletal remains.
1968.		
9 April.	East.	1 carcass, several recent nests.
"	" 2.	5 carcasses.
11 "	North.	1 fresh nest.
12 "	"	1 killed offshore.
13 "	"	1 seen, 1 laying, 4 nests, 2 carcasses.
14 "	"	1 laying, 3 carcasses.
10 May.	East.	14 carcasses.
11 "	"	2 laying, 2 carcasses, 6 recent nests
13 "	"	2 laying, 1 fresh nest.
14 "	"	2 fresh nests.
25 "	North.	24 fresh nests.
13 June.	"	1 seen, 1 carcass.
early Aug.	"	1 laying.

Attempts were made to incubate 2 batches of eggs, collected from a nest in May, but these were unsuccessful. The eggs, however, which had been buried in warm moist sand were still fresh after 2½ months.

No attempt was made to 'tag' any of the turtles seen, as it was the intention of the club to collect information on the breeding season and nesting behaviour of the Leatherbacks. A large number of visitors who joined the excursions saw the nesting process, and good photographic records were obtained together with many measurements of the turtles.

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S

1. All turtles are protected from the 1st of June to the 30th of September. The above records show that the Leatherback turtle nests in Trinidad from at least as early as April, and that large numbers are slaughtered during April and May, which appears to be their main breeding period. If this species is to be conserved the close season must be extended.
- 2 It is important that all details of turtles, nests and carcasses are submitted to the club. When this has been done for a few more years the club should attempt to estimate the size of the nesting population, and give serious consideration to establishing a hatchery.
3. As a temporary measure, the club should obtain permission to collect several batches of eggs, and experiment with incubation. Much interesting information could be obtained about development and hatching, and the young turtles could be released at sea when a few days old.
- 4 Until adequate protection is provided by law, and by official patrols, the club should extend their own patrols between April and June, with the help of other interested persons, and try to educate hunters in the need for conservation, as every effort must be made to stop the needless slaughter of the adult females and the robbing of their nests.

Zoology Dept., U.W.I., St. Augustine.