



Marine Conservation Society

The UK charity dedicated to the protection of the marine environment and its wildlife
Registered Charity No. 1004005

PRESS RELEASE

PRESS RELEASE: Embargoed 00:01 hrs, Wednesday 21st August 2002.

RESEARCH INTO ENDANGERED CARIBBEAN TURTLES GETS BOOST FROM UK SUPPORT

London, 22nd August 2002. This weekend UK marine turtle specialists from the University of Wales, Swansea and the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) will initiate a 7-day research workshop in the Cayman Islands, which aims to give biologists in the UK Overseas Territories new research skills allowing them to further investigate the status of their endangered marine turtle populations.

Researchers from Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat and the Turks and Caicos Islands will attend the workshop, which is funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Environment Fund for the Overseas Territories, and is part of a 3-year UK Government sponsored project called *Turtles in the Caribbean Overseas Territories* (TCOT).

FCO Minister Dr Denis MacShane said: *'This is the first workshop of its kind to be held in the Caribbean UK Overseas Territories. The Foreign Office funding is proof of this Government's commitment to the conservation of endangered marine turtle populations in the region'.*

The workshop will be coordinated by the TCOT team of specialists from the Marine Turtle Research Group of the University of Wales Swansea, the Marine Conservation Society and the University of Western Ontario, and will be hosted by the Cayman Island Department of Environment and the Cayman Turtle Farm. Participants will bring their existing skills to the workshop and will be trained in nesting beach surveying, reef surveying, turtle tagging, genetic sampling and analysis, as well as how to conduct socio-economic surveys of turtle fishermen, turtle meat sellers and tourists.

Since its launch in October last year, the TCOT project has been working with local partners to assess the status of endangered marine turtles and their exploitation in the six Overseas Territories. After 3 years and through a comprehensive programme of scientific research and social surveys, the TCOT team aims to collect and analyse enough data in order to provide the UK and Overseas Territory Governments with specific recommendations to improve the conservation management of the endangered turtle populations found in each Territory.

'We are very pleased that biologists from all Overseas Territories in the region are coming to the workshop' said Dr Brendan Godley, TCOT coordinator from the University of Wales *'Only through these long-term capacity building exercises can we hope to ensure that the Overseas Territories will be able to carry out the research needed to understand how to successfully conserve their endangered marine turtle populations for generations to come'* **Ends**

For further information, photographs and video please contact:

Peter Richardson, Species Policy Officer
Sue Ranger, Wildlife Projects Officer
Marine Conservation Society
9 Gloucester Road, Ross-on-Wye
Herefordshire, HR9 5BU
Tel: 01989 566017, fax: 01989 567815
Mobiles: 07855 071008, 07971 243144
E-mail: turtle@mcsuk.org
www.mcsuk.org

or
Dr Brendan Godley,
Dr Annette Broderick
Marine Turtle Research Group
University of Wales,
Swansea
Tel: 01792 554139
E-mail: MTN@mtrg.u-net.com
www.seaturtle.org/mtrg

Editor's notes:

1. **Turtles in the Caribbean Overseas Territories (TCOT)** is a 3-year project funded by the UK Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), with additional funding for training and capacity building initiatives from the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Environment Fund for the Overseas Territories (FCO-EFOT). TCOT is coordinated by the University of Wales and the Marine Conservation Society, in association with the University of Western Ontario and the University of Cardiff. Overseas Territories partners include: **Anguilla** - Department of Fisheries and the Anguilla National Trust; **Bermuda** – The Ministry of the Environment; **British Virgin Islands** – Conservation and Fisheries Department, BVI National Trust; **Cayman Islands** – Department of Environment, Cayman Turtle Farm; **Montserrat** – Government of Montserrat, Montserrat National Trust; **Turks & Caicos Islands** – Department of Environment and Coastal Resources.
2. The World Conservation Union (IUCN) recognizes seven species of marine turtle. Four species are known to nest and forage within the UK Overseas Territories in the Caribbean, including the leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*), loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*), hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) and green (*Chelonia mydas*) turtles. There are unconfirmed reports of Kemp's ridley turtles (*Lepidochelys kempii*) having been spotted in the waters of some Territories. The IUCN lists the hawksbill, leatherback and Kemp's ridley turtles as critically endangered, whereas the green and loggerhead turtles are listed as endangered.
3. **The Marine Turtle Research Group**, University of Wales Swansea carries out research and conservation projects regarding turtles in UK waters, Mediterranean and the UK Overseas Territories including Cayman Islands and Ascension Island. Staff edit the international Marine Turtle Newsletter (www.seaturtle.org/mtn). Contacts: *Dr Brendan Godley & Dr Annette Broderick* 01792 554139
4. The **Marine Conservation Society (MCS)** is the UK Charity dedicated to the protection of the marine environment and its wildlife. The MCS Marine Turtle Conservation Programme is supported by Cheltenham & Gloucester plc. Contact: *Peter Richardson* 01989 566017
5. FCO-EFOT provided £31,180 for the workshop. It has also contributed an additional £62,659 over a four year period for the training and capacity building elements of the £145,000 DEFRA-funded TCOT project. The £500,000 per annum FCO-EFOT was established in 1999 following the White Paper 'Partnership for Progress and Prosperity'. Its aims are: to support the sustainable management of the environment of the Overseas Territories and to ensure that their rich biodiversity remains an asset for present and future generations; to increase public participation in, and enjoyment of, the economic, social and spiritual benefits of a healthy environment with a flourishing variety of natural habitats and species; and to extend the participation of the Overseas Territories in regional and international environmental activities. Further information on FCO-EFOT can be found at www.fco.gov.uk/environment or from Trish O'Donnell in the FCO Press Office on 020 7270 3114.
6. Details of the TCOT project can be found at www.seaturtle.org/mtrg/projects/tcot/index.shtml