



Marine Conservation Society

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PRESS RELEASE

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CONSERVATION OFFICERS FROM THE UK'S CARIBBEAN OVERSEAS TERRITORIES LEARN HOW TO SAVE ENDANGERED TURTLES

15.08.03 - This week the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) increased its support for the conservation of endangered marine turtles in the Caribbean by funding the participation of government conservation officers from the region's UK Overseas Territories¹ in a groundbreaking workshop on the island of Bermuda.

The workshop is coordinated by the Bermuda Turtle Project (BTP)², a joint research initiative of the Bermuda Aquarium (BAMZ) and the Caribbean Conservation Corporation (CCC). Participants take part in the BTP's annual research, when each day for two weeks, turtles are captured in a 2,000 foot-long net, studied and then released back into the wild. The participants develop skills, from catching, measuring and tagging turtles, to taking blood samples for genetic analysis. The participants also discuss relevant scientific papers on marine turtle biology and debate contemporary conservation issues. This year's course also included an added bonus when the participants fitted one of the captured turtles with a state-of-the-art satellite transmitter to help understand marine turtle migration³. The combination of hands-on science and literature discussion gives participants an understanding of crucial scientific and conservation issues.

"This course is exciting for me because I have learned things I never knew before" said Carlos Sasso, Fisheries Officer with Anguilla's Department of Fisheries and Coastal Resources, "It's good that someone like me can learn these skills, take them home and pass them on to the others in the Department. It's good for the staff and it's good for the turtles too!"

Participants from Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Grenada, St Lucia, Turks and Caicos Islands and the USA arrived in Bermuda last week to kick off the workshop, which is run by BTP Coordinator, Jennifer Gray, and CCC research associates Drs Peter and Anne Meylan. UK Overseas Territory Government departments are partners in the Turtles in the Caribbean Overseas Territories (TCOT)⁴ project. TCOT is a UK Government funded project coordinated by the Marine

Turtle Research Group⁵ and the Marine Conservation Society (MCS)⁶. The FCO Environment Fund's⁷ support of the Bermuda workshop is a contribution to TCOT's efforts to build turtle conservation and research capacity in the UK Overseas Territories.

"The workshop is highly intensive and the participants always go home with a huge amount of information, but each year we find we also learn from them, it's a two-way learning process!" said Jennifer Gray, BTP Coordinator, *"We hope that the workshop inspires the participants to set up marine turtle conservation and research projects back home and help the struggle to save the Caribbean's endangered turtle populations⁸".* **Ends**

Stunning photographs and video of the participants catching and tagging turtles in Bermuda's azure seas are available for media use. The participants will also be available for interviews during the workshop on the 13th, 14th & 15th August 2003. For more information contact:

**Peter Richardson, Species Policy Officer, or Sue Ranger, Wildlife Projects Officer
Marine Conservation Society (MCS), 9 Gloucester Road, Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire HR9 5BU
Tel: 01989 566017, Fax: 01989 567815, E-mail: peter@mcsuk.org & sue@mcsuk.org**

Editor's notes:

1. Anguilla, Cayman Islands, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Montserrat and the Turks and Caicos Islands are all UK Overseas Territories.
2. The Bermuda Turtle Project (BTP) www.cccturtle.org/bermuda, a collaborative research initiative of the Bermuda Aquarium Museum and Zoo (BAMZ) and the Caribbean Conservation Corporation (CCC), has as its mission to "promote the conservation of marine turtles through research and education". Founded in 1926, the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum & Zoo (BAMZ) www.BAMZ.org is committed to inspire appreciation and care of island environments. It is supported by the Bermuda Zoological Society (BZS) and U.S.-registered Friends of the Bermuda Aquarium (FOBA). The BAMZ fulfils its mission through animal habitat exhibits, which focus on species from oceanic islands, as well as related conservation, education and research programmes. The Caribbean Conservation Corporation (CCC) www.cccturtle.org is a non-profit organization concerned solely with the conservation of marine turtles. It is based in Gainesville, Florida.
3. In recent years marine turtle researchers have been using satellite telemetry to track turtle migrations. Satellite transmitter tags are attached to the shell of the turtle so that every time the turtle surfaces to breathe, the tag transmits the turtle's position, as well as other information (e.g. depth of turtle's last dives), to satellites orbiting above, which then relay the data by e-mail to the computer of the scientist who attached the tag.
4. Turtles in the Caribbean Overseas Territories (TCOT) was launched in 2001 and is a 3-year project funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). TCOT aims to assess the status of marine turtles and their exploitation in the UK Overseas Territories in the Caribbean.
5. The Marine Turtle Research Group (MTRG) www.seaturtle.org/mtrg, 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. MTRG staff edit the international Marine Turtle Newsletter www.seaturtle.org/mtn.
6. The Marine Conservation Society (MCS) is the UK Charity dedicated to the protection of the marine environment and its wildlife. Since its formation in 1983, MCS has become a recognised authority on marine and coastal conservation and is regularly consulted by Government on a range of marine issues. MCS produces the annual *Good Beach Guide*, as well as promoting public participation in volunteer projects and surveys such as *Adopt-a-Beach*, *Seasearch* and *Basking Shark Watch*. With support from the Cheltenham & Gloucester, MCS is joint lead partner of the Marine Turtle Grouped Species Action Plan for UK waters and the UK Overseas Territories.
7. The FCO has a global network of missions, and the Environment Fund (now brought under the umbrella of the Global Opportunities Fund) utilises this network in association with NGOs, governments and institutions to support a range of focused, high quality environment projects that will contribute to the UK's international environment policy objectives.
8. The World Conservation Union (IUCN) recognizes seven species of marine turtle. The leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) is the largest and is listed as *critically endangered*, as are the Kemp's ridley turtle (*Lepidochelys kempii*) and the hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*). The loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*), green (*Chelonia mydas*) and olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) turtles are listed as *endangered* and Australia's flatback turtle (*Natator depressus*) is listed as *Data deficient*. Green, hawksbill, leatherback and loggerhead turtles forage and nest throughout the Caribbean, whereas Kemp's and olive ridley turtles are occasional visitors. The flatback turtle nests only on the coast of Australia.