

# The Way Ahead



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Hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) hatchlings - Turks & Caicos islands

The UK Government is committed to contributing to regional management of marine turtles in the Caribbean by addressing critical gaps in the knowledge of marine turtles in the UK Overseas Territories and reviewing turtle management policies to assess their conservation impacts and relative benefits. This is in line with the recommendations made at the CITES Caribbean Hawksbill Turtle Range State Dialogue meetings. TCOT will assist in meeting these objectives with the current research initiatives including:

- Nesting beach surveys in Anguilla, British Virgin Islands (BVI), Cayman, Montserrat and Turks & Caicos Islands (TCI)
- Foraging site surveys in Anguilla, BVI, Cayman Islands, Montserrat and TCI
- Genetic sampling and tagging in Anguilla, BVI, Cayman Islands, Montserrat and TCI
- Socio-economic surveys in each Territory
- 'Caribbean TURTLEWATCH', a voluntary recreational diver survey of turtle foraging habitat in each Territory
- 'Turtles and Tourism' awareness programme and voluntary survey in each Territory



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Examining a green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) hatchling - Montserrat Department of Fisheries

TCOT is coordinated by the Marine Turtle Research Group, University of Wales, Swansea and the Marine Conservation Society (MCS), in association with the University of Wales, Cardiff, The University of Western Ontario, Canada, the Cayman Islands Department of Environment and the Cayman Turtle Farm. TCOT also acknowledges the support of WIDECAST and Seaturtle.org.

**DEFRA**  
Department for  
Environment,  
Food & Rural Affairs

  
Foreign & Commonwealth  
Office

Turtles in the Caribbean Overseas Territories (TCOT) is funded by the UK Department for 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).

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT [www.seaturtle.org/mtrg/projects/tcot](http://www.seaturtle.org/mtrg/projects/tcot)



**The Marine Turtle Research Group,  
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The Group carries out marine turtle research and conservation projects in Brazil, Cyprus, Guinea Bissau, the UK and the UK Overseas Territories including Ascension Island.  
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**MARINE CONSERVATION  
SOCIETY**

**The Marine Conservation Society**  
MCS is the UK charity dedicated to the protection of the marine environment and its wildlife and is joint lead partner in the UK Marine Turtles Grouped Species Action Plan. The MCS Marine Turtle Conservation Programme is supported by Cheltenham & Gloucester plc.  
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# TURTLES

*in the Caribbean UK  
Overseas Territories*

  
MARINE CONSERVATION  
SOCIETY  
Supported by  
**C&G Cheltenham & Gloucester**

  
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# Background

The exploitation of marine turtles in the Caribbean has generated an extraordinary level of international concern in recent years. The CITES Caribbean Hawksbill Turtle Range State Dialogue process has led to a general agreement among Range States to work towards a regional management strategy for the hawksbill turtle in the Caribbean.

Green, hawksbill, leatherback and loggerhead turtles occur in the six UK Overseas Territories in the Caribbean region. While legal turtle harvests continue in four of these Territories, there is currently little understanding of the impact of these harvests on Caribbean marine turtle populations. In recognition of the need for a regional management approach, the Turtles in the Caribbean Overseas Territories (TCOT) research project is the United Kingdom's contribution to furthering the understanding of marine turtle ecology and exploitation in the Caribbean.

TCOT was launched in November 2001 and is now carrying out a programme of habitat monitoring, genetic stock analysis and socio-economic surveys, in order to assess the status and evaluate the use of marine turtles in the UK Overseas Territories in the Caribbean.

Based on the data from this research, TCOT will produce a series of recommendations in 2004, which will be provided to the Governments of Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, Turks and Caicos Islands and the UK. These recommendations will be used to shape the future conservation, monitoring and management of marine turtle populations in these Territories.

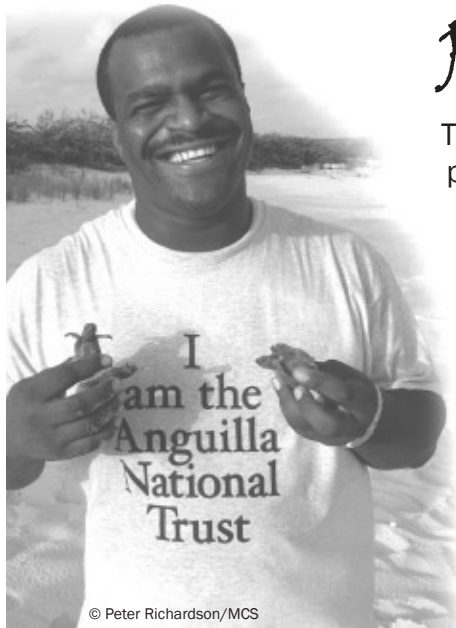


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An adult female green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) taken in the legal harvest in the Turks & Caicos Islands

## Partnerships

The TCOT team works with local project partners in each UK Overseas Territory, who are integral to TCOT data collection, analysis and assessment. These project partners came together in Grand Cayman in August 2002 to take part in the first TCOT workshop. Twenty-five participants shared their skills at the workshop and were further trained in nesting beach surveying, in-water capture, turtle tagging and genetic sampling, as well as socio-economic survey administration.



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## British Virgin Islands

**Project partners: Conservation and Fisheries Department and British Virgin Islands National Trust.**

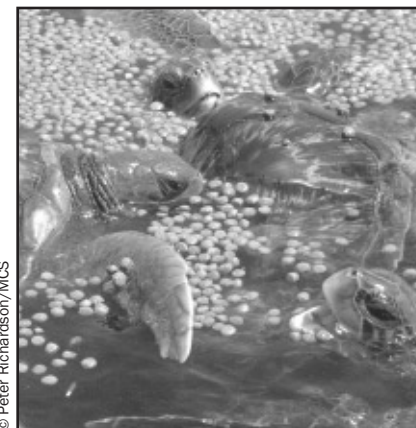
There is a legal harvest of green, hawksbill and loggerhead turtles and a voluntary moratorium on leatherbacks. The Conservation and Fisheries Department have been monitoring leatherback nesting beaches on Tortola for over a decade. Recent TCOT surveys suggest that there may be regionally important nesting and foraging hawksbill and green turtle populations at Anegada.



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A turtle fisherman helping with In-water sampling (*Chelonia mydas*) British Virgin Islands

## Cayman Islands



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Feeding time - Cayman Turtle Farm

The CIDoE have been monitoring marine turtle populations in recent years. TCOT will analyse the market for turtle products in the Cayman Islands and assess the impact of the Cayman Turtle Farm 'head-start' programme on local green turtle populations. Recent surveys confirm that head-started green turtles released from the Cayman Turtle Farm in the 1980's are returning to the Cayman Islands to breed.



© Peter Richardson/MCS

In-water sampling of foraging hawksbill turtles (*Eretmohelys imbricata*) - Cayman islands

**Project partners: Cayman Islands Department of Environment (CIDoE), Cayman Turtle Farm**

There is a legal harvest of green, hawksbill and loggerhead turtles as well as legal trade in green turtle meat produced at the Cayman Turtle Farm.

## Bermuda

**Project partners: The Ministry of Environment and the Bermuda Turtle Project (BTP)**

All turtles are afforded absolute protection. The BTP runs one of the longest in-water marine turtle studies in the world and will be sharing their findings and expertise with TCOT. Their genetic analyses link Bermuda's foraging hawksbill population with populations in Costa Rica, Cuba, Mexico and the US Virgin Islands. The BTP contribute to regional capacity building through an annual training course.



© Christopher Scott Boykin/Bermuda Turtle Project

A student on the Bermuda Turtle Project course.

## Montserrat

**Project partners: Department of Fisheries and the Montserrat National Trust**

There is a legal harvest of marine turtles in Montserrat. Green, hawksbill and leatherback turtles are known to nest in Montserrat and surveys have revealed that turtles are beginning to nest on beaches created by the volcanic eruption in 1995.

## Anguilla

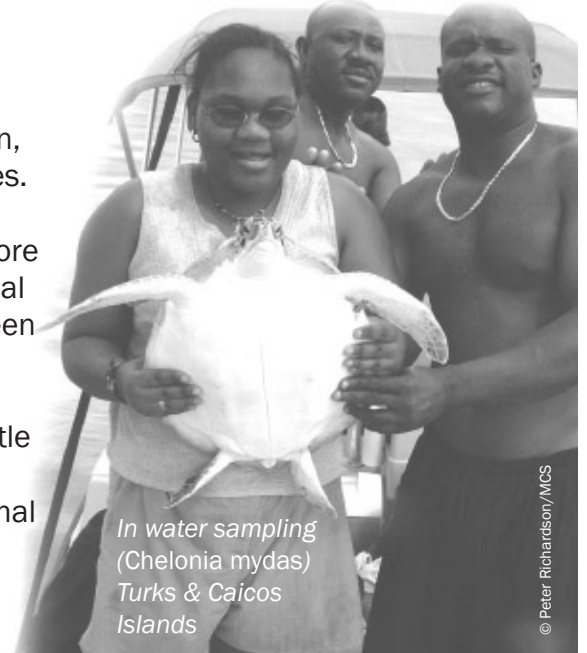
**Project partners: Department of Fisheries (DFMR) and Marine Resources and the Anguilla National Trust**

Anguilla has imposed a 10-year moratorium on marine turtle harvest. Former turtle fishermen are calling for changes in the management of the turtle fishery and are suggesting a limited and highly regulated harvest.

## Turks and Caicos Islands

**Project partners: Department of Environment and Coastal Resources (DECR)**

There is a legal harvest of green, hawksbill and loggerhead turtles. Preliminary TCOT appraisals suggest turtle exploitation is more extensive than anticipated. Initial DECR in-water sampling has been catalysed by cooperation with turtle fishermen and indicates that resident juvenile green turtle populations may be afflicted by fibropapilloma, a potentially lethal disease.



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In water sampling (*Chelonia mydas*) Turks & Caicos Islands