

Leatherback Turtle Conservation in Trinidad and Tobago 1963-2021- Brief Overview

by Lorraine Barrow

2021

Launch of the **National Sea Turtle Task Force (MOPD, IMA, MoA, MNS, THA)** which would oversee sea turtle research and conservation - introduced by the Honourable Camille Robinson-Regis, Minister of Planning and Development on 6th January 2021

2000s

- In 2006, all the Turtle Community Groups joined forces to create The Turtle Village Trust, (TVT) comprising 5 community groups: **Nature Seekers; Fishing Pond Turtle Conservation Group; Grande Riviere Nature Tour Guide Association; SOS Tobago; and Matura 2 Matelot Network.**
- Lori Lee Lum** published report - [Assessment of incidental sea turtle catch in the artisanal gillnet fishery in Trinidad and Tobago, West Indies](#)
- Led, by Dr. Scott Eckert in 2009, WIDECAS published - [Sea Turtle Recovery Action Plan for Trinidad and Tobago](#)

1984

- Lori Lee Lum** presented the first National Report on Turtles for Trinidad and Tobago - delivered in 1983 at Symposium in Costa Rica.
- Turtle population started declining on the North East Coast mainly due to sand mining and turtle egg poaching.
- Ms. Nathai-Gyan, of the Forestry Division at the time, published, "[Marine Turtle Management in Trinidad and Tobago with Specific Reference to the Leatherback Turtles](#)".

1973

- In May 1973 TTFNC and Professor Bacon presented a report entitled "[The Status of Sea Turtles in Trinidad and Tobago](#)", contained recommendations to existing laws
- Ms. Molly Gaskin and Mrs. Karilyn Shephard** well-known environmental activists and founders of the Pointe-a-Pierre Wildfowl Trust together with volunteers assisted to support turtle patrols even after the TTFNC stopped patrolling in the 1980s.

1965

Professor Peter Bacon, former Senior Lecturer of Zoology in the Department of Natural Sciences - UWI with some university students and the TTFNC conducted turtle patrols of the North-east beaches - Toco and Matura, to protect the endangered species and to collect data

2010s

- In 2014, the EMA designated 5 species of sea turtles as Environmentally Sensitive Species - 1-Leatherback, 2-Loggerhead, 3-Green Turtle, 4-Olive Ridley, 5-Hawksbill
- In 2014, World renowned naturalist **Sir David Attenborough** produced documentary entitled - "[One of the densest leatherback turtle nesting beaches in the world](#)" highlighting Trinidad and Tobago

1990s

- Led by **Dr. Carol James**, [Nature Seekers](#) is established comprising communities in Matura.
- March 1990, Government restricts access to Matura Beach and Fishing Pond with special permits;
- Dr. Carol James and Mr. Fourniller published "[Marine Turtle Management in North East Trinidad - A Successful Community Based Approach Towards Endangered Species Conservation](#)"
- In 1994 legislation was introduced - Fisheries (Conservation of Marine Turtles) Regulations (Chap. 67:51) which states - Living marine turtles that are incidentally captured shall be returned immediately to the sea (reg. 5). Owners of commercial shrimp trawlers shall participate in marine turtle conservation practices specified by Minister.

1983

- Established in 1978, the IMA began providing support to the turtle conservation project.
- Former IMA Researcher, **Lori Lee Lum**, conducted extensive amount of research on the leatherback turtle richly adding to the existing research

1970

The start of a decade (1970-1980) of turtle tagging in Trinidad and Tobago. With assistance from the University of Florida, a total of 330 turtles were tagged. In 1970, Professor Peter Bacon published his research paper titled, "[Studies on the Leatherback Turtle, Dermochelys coriacea \(L.\), in Trinidad, West Indies](#)"

1963

The Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalist Club (T&TFNC) received first report of a leatherback turtle that was poached and killed for its meat

