

TROPIC NEWS

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND NATURAL
RESOURCES

DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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Volume **5** Number **1**

LEATHERBACK NEWS FOR '92

We sometimes get discouraged at the state of things here in the Virgin Islands, with regard to politics, education, health care, and the environment. It's easy to make remarks that nothing ever gets done, and no matter how hard you try, you can't make a difference.

Fortunately, for the Leatherback turtle population on St. Croix's Sandy Point, the efforts of a small band of individuals has, over time, proven to be successful. This success is evident in the fact that information was collected on a record number of 55 turtles and a record 345 nests this season. Scientists and Earthwatch volunteers patrol the beach from sunset to sunrise April through August to collect data and aid in protecting the endangered species.

The Leatherback Recovery Project was started in 1981 by the Division of Fish & Wildlife. In 1984 Sandy Point became part of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Caribbean Islands National Wildlife Refuge System. There are only 13 significant nesting sites worldwide.

(The following is reprinted from a report by Peter Dutton and Donna McDonald of the Leatherback Recovery Project)

The Sandy Point National Wildlife Refuge, St. Croix, supports the largest and best studied population of nesting leatherback sea turtles in the United States and northern Caribbean. Since 1981, saturation tagging and consistent night patrols during nesting season have yielded a comprehensive database of information on each female nesting at Sandy Point. The 1992 nesting season began February 9 and ended July 27, with a peak in late April / early May. Fifty five turtles were observed, 54 of which laid a total of 345 nests with an average of 78.3 yolked eggs per clutch. Each female produced an average of 6.4 nests with an average internesting interval of 9-10 days. Seventeen of the turtles were remigrants, (those who have nested here in previous years) with remigration intervals of 2-4 years. Of the 232 nests excavated, mean hatch success was 66.3%.

Nightly patrols and a concerted relocation effort have reduced the major historical threats of poaching and erosion. Of nests laid in 1992, 145 were relocated. The slaughter of gravid (pregnant) female leatherbacks has been eliminated, although there is still poaching of both eggs and adults of green and hawksbill turtles after nightly patrols cease.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

The Division of Fish & Wildlife currently has a number of full time positions available:

VACANT POSITIONS

Chief of Fisheries - Position is fully experienced managerial level work, involving supervisory biological experience with some field work, but largely administrative responsibilities. Work involves supervising and directing the staff of the Bureau of Fisheries Programs and formulating and implementing plans for the study of habitats, life history and classification of fishes and other aquatic organisms. (St. Thomas)

Environmental Specialist II - This position is under the Fisheries Bureau. It is a research position and involves being principal investigator for several projects as assigned. 50% of time involved in field work, 50% office. Responsible for data collection, analysis and reports that meet scientific standards. (St. Thomas)

NEW POSITIONS

Environmental Specialist I - Under Fisheries Bureau. Responsible for assisting in data collection and analysis. Organizes and prepares for field projects. Responsible for boats (maintenance, etc.). (St. Thomas)

Environmental Specialist Trainee - Under Fisheries Bureau. Responsible for assisting in data collection and analysis. Experience in boat handling and diving helpful. Entry level position. (St. Thomas)

Environmental Specialist II - Under the Environmental Education Bureau. Responsible for draft and final publications of environmental education brochures, newsletters, and other written information. Responsible for assisting in school activities such as field trips, oral presentations, etc. (St. Croix)

Interested parties should contact Ann Seiler, Director of Fish & Wildlife for specific information.

COMING SOON

- SPORTFISHING LOG BOOKS
- BENTHIC MAPPING UPDATE
- HOLIDAY GIFT IDEAS

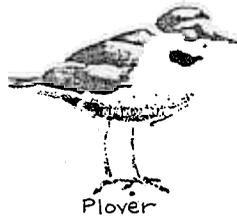
SHOREBIRDS



Stilt

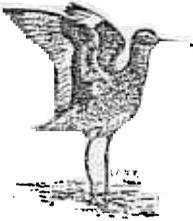
Shorebirds, in the family Charadriiformes, are small, long-legged, long-billed birds, usually seen along beaches, ponds and mud flats. Most shorebirds are winter migrants. These birds breed in North America, often on the tundra in Alaska and northern Canada. They begin the fall migration in late July or early August and begin arriving in the Virgin Islands in mid-August. Many of the birds spend time here on their way to other destinations further south. Some of these migratory birds will remain here through the winter.

Not all species of shorebirds in the Virgin Islands are migrants: four species do breed here. The



Plover

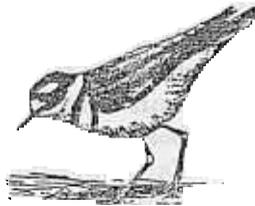
Black-necked Stilt and Wilson's Plover commonly nest in mud flats at the edge of salt ponds and dry upland areas around the ponds. The Stilts are active in defending their nests, flying at intruders or doing what is known as a broken wing display. The parent will pretend to be injured in an effort to distract predators and lead them away from the nest.



Willet

The willet is rare in the Virgin Islands, with only two nests reported last year, and one this year.

The killdeer is an unusual shorebird in that it lives in upland grassy areas, not around wetlands.



Killdeer

EMPLOYEE PROFILES

Have you ever wondered what the folks at Fish & Wildlife actually do for a living? The job descriptions are varied: collecting data on recreational and commercial fishing, surveying the population of seabird rookeries on nearby cays, reviewing permit applications for coastal development, leading seashore walks for students. In upcoming issues, individual staff members will be profiled, offering insights into their work, and information on current projects.

COASTWEEKS CLEANUPS

Coastweeks 1992, held from September 18 - October 12 was a big success. The annual event is sponsored by the Center For Marine Conservation, and focuses on promoting awareness of our oceans as an important, but limited, natural resource. The CMC's aim is to reduce the dumping of waste into the oceans. Coastal communities around the world take part in the event by organizing shoreline cleanups and other activities. Locally, school children became involved through a poster contest sponsored by DPNR, and field trips coordinated by the Education Department. Businesses, clubs, dive centers, and other groups hauled trash and debris away from our shores. Thanks to all of you who helped!



QUOTE

"We can never have enough of nature"

-Edward Abbey



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