



Barbados Turtle Project Trains Tobago Cays Marine Park Staff

[Bridgetown] (SEPTEMBER 20, 2010) Barbados has just played host to an international training workshop convened by the Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network (WIDECAST) and the Barbados Sea Turtle Project (BSTP) at the Island Inn Hotel. Designed to share Barbados' sea turtle expertise with staff and partners of the Tobago Cays Marine Park (TCMP) in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the workshop was funded by the Protected Areas and Associated Livelihoods Project (OPAAL) of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) to develop capacity in the TCMP to conduct sea turtle population assessments.

University of the West Indies Professor Julia Horrocks, Director of the BSTP, commented "Barbados has achieved quite a lot of success in protecting its sea turtles, and we are always pleased to share what we've learned with colleagues from other islands. Because sea turtles move freely between Barbados and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, it's important that we all work together to ensure their survival."

The workshop provided an opportunity for the TCMP trainees to learn from BSTP staff and their partners, including Hightide Watersports and Ocean Adventures, about the various techniques used to catch sea turtles for research and census purposes. During field work, trainees tagged and measured the hand-captured turtles, practiced filling out standardised reporting forms, and released the endangered animals back to the sea. Trainees also accompanied BSTP staff on nightly beach patrols to document sea turtle nesting and hatching, which peaks at this time of year.

Dr. Karen Eckert, Executive Director of WIDECAST, which is an international scientific network comprised of sea turtle experts, natural resource professionals and community-based conservationists in more than 40 Caribbean countries (including Barbados and St. Vincent and the Grenadines), noted that "Barbados was selected to host the training workshop because the research conducted here is an excellent example of a professional, long-term approach to sea turtle population monitoring – it's exactly the kind of thing we'd like to see implemented throughout the Caribbean, and especially within the boundaries of the region's marine protected areas."

In addition to scientific techniques, workshop participants discussed threats to sea turtle survival and shared ideas about how to reduce these threats, which range from the illegal hunting of sea turtles and poaching of eggs to pollution and the loss of nesting habitat due to coastal development. Strategies for successfully increasing public awareness of the protected status of sea turtles were also shared.

According to Mr. Orlando Harvey, TCMP Marine Biologist, "The workshop was extremely valuable because it focused on practical approaches to management issues that we all face, including limited resources and a lack of public awareness. It was useful for us to gain first-hand experience in Barbados to share practical ways to solve common management issues."

For more information about the Barbados Sea Turtle Project please visit www.barbadosseaturtles.org. For more information about the Tobago Cays Marine Park please contact Mr. Orlando Harvey on (784) 485-8191.



Sea turtle research work in Barbados with green turtles (above) and hawksbill turtles (below). All turtles were subsequently released. Photos: E. Doyle.