

2021

Bastimentos Island National Marine Park, Bocas del Toro, Panama Sea Turtle Research Assistant Program

Since 2003, Anne and Peter Meylan have worked in partnership with the Sea Turtle Conservancy (STC) to monitor important Panamanian sea turtle nesting beaches in the Bocas del Toro Province and the Comarca Ngäbe Buglé, from the Changuinola River to the Chiriquí River. Key among these beaches are three in the Bastimentos Island National Marine Park (BINMP), Small Zapatilla Cay, Big Zapatilla Cay and Playa Larga. Up to 6 research assistants are needed to help with this work.

Research Assistantship (RA) positions are voluntary (unpaid) and selected RAs are expected to plan and finance their own travel to and from Bocas del Toro, Panama, and work on the project for at least two months. Good knowledge of Spanish and English is required. Selected RAs will receive room and board in small, very basic field camps and will be expected to help with cooking and clean-up.

Applications will be accepted until all positions are filled.

Good knowledge of Spanish and English is required. Applicants with: 1) education in biology or related fields, 2) previous fieldwork with sea turtles, and 3) experience working/living in multicultural environments in isolated locations for extended periods will be most competitive for these positions.

COVID-19 considerations:

With respect to COVID-19, RA's will be expected to meet any and all requirements for travel to Panama and within Panama as required by Panamanian authorities. RA's will furthermore be required to have international health insurance that would cover any need for medical attention while in Panama. The US embassy in Panama maintains a very useful site for travelers to Panama: <https://pa.usembassy.gov/covid-19-information/#Panama%20Specific%20Information>. Our project and all participants remained Covid-free in 2020 and we are doing all that we can to keep it that way in 2021.

Applications for RA positions must include the following materials:

- Application Form (download below);
- A cover letter explaining why you are interested in the Research Assistant position, details of any relevant experiences and a statement of your level of proficiency in English and Spanish (either a formal qualification or an indication of your written/oral comprehension);
- A CV or resume with pertinent information; and
- Name and email contact of three professional references.

Completed materials should be emailed to Peter Meylan (meylanpa@eckerd.edu), Anne Meylan (anne.meylan@myFWC.com), and Cristina Ordoñez at cristinao@conserveturtles.org.

Applications will be accepted on a continuing basis through July 2021. Please complete your application at least six weeks before your desired start date. Our last anticipated start date for 2021 will be 1 September. Short-listed candidates will be interviewed over skype by project principles. Inquires in English can be sent to Peter Meylan (meylanpa@eckerd.edu), email inquiries in Spanish can be sent to Cristina Ordoñez at cristinao@conserveturtles.org.

Project description: Conservation and monitoring of nesting hawksbills and their nests.

Location: Bocas del Toro Province, Panama, Bastimentos Island National Marine Park (BINMP): Zapatilla Cays and Playa Larga

Project Dates: 27 April – 2 November 2021.

Due to training requirements and logistical challenges, all RA's must commit to a minimum two-month stay. Special consideration for RA's who can start as early as 27 April or who are able to stay until 2 November.

Project summary:

Since 2003, Anne and Peter Meylan have worked in partnership with the Sea Turtle Conservancy (STC) to monitor important Panamanian sea turtle nesting beaches in Bocas del Toro Province and the Comarca Ngäbe Buglé, from the Changuinola River (border with Costa Rica) to the Chiriquí River. Four sea turtle species are found in the waters of Bocas del Toro and the Comarca; Leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*), Hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), Green (*Chelonia mydas*) and Loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*). Within this region, we have standardized monitoring, research and protection efforts in collaboration with STC and members of local communities close to the nesting beaches. This program has had very positive results. More than 1000 hawksbill nests were recorded in the BINMP in each of the last two nesting seasons. In the last 15 years, there has been a reduction in the illegal killing of turtles on the majority of nesting beaches in the area, and an increasing nesting trend for Hawksbill turtles. Despite these advances, numerous threats remain for the sea turtles within and adjacent to BINMP, including increasing pressure on coastal and marine habitats through unregulated tourism development and the continued hunting of turtles for personal consumption and commercial purposes both on the beach and within park waters.

Work description:

Up to 6 research assistants (RAs) will be trained in sea turtle monitoring techniques by, and work under the supervision of, the Meylans, Cristina Ordoñez (STC's Panama Research Coordinator), and experienced local beach monitors. The hawksbill nesting season in BINMP extends from the end of April until early November or even December. We monitor three different nesting beaches daily from 1 May through 30 October. The beach monitoring team will be made up of local Panamanians with moderate to extensive experience on all three beaches and RAs from multiple countries around the world. The primary responsibilities of the RAs will include day time census patrols, night time tagging patrols, and logistic support of all camp activities. Day time patrols include identifying and accurately recording all emergence and nesting activity, marking of nests for future hatching success evaluations, and performing excavations of hatched nests. Night time patrols include tagging and measuring nesting females. All RAs are expected to contribute to recording data, maintaining the camp, cooking and kitchen clean-up, making food trips to town, and other activities in support of the project.

RAs can expect to work very long hours, throughout the day and night, often with little sleep. Beach patrols require walking between 6 to 12 kilometers in soft sand and in extreme weather conditions. Night time patrols are 5 hours long (8 pm – 1 am or 1 am to 6 am) and often conducted alone. Therefore, excellent physical condition is a requirement for the RA positions. For each week of work on the project, RAs will be given one day off with a small stipend to support each day off in town.

Project camps:

The work will be carried out on three different beaches in BINMP: "Small" Zapatilla Cay (Zapatilla Uno), "Big" Zapatilla Cay (Zapatilla Dos), and Long Beach (Playa Larga). RAs will rotate among the three beaches while participating in the sea turtle program and may have an opportunity to work for short periods at other beaches in the region. All three camps are located in remote parts of BINMP. Those on the Zapatilla Cays are only accessible by boat. Playa Larga is also normally accessed by boat but can be reached by a half-day hike. The camps are all very basic structures without electricity or running water. Solar chargers are used to charge cell phones which allow minimal contact with the outside world.

2021
Bastimentos Island National Marine Park, Bocas del Toro, Panama
Sea Turtle Research Assistant Program
1. Application Form

FULL NAME		AGE	
ADDRESS			
TELEPHONE NUMBER			
E-MAIL			
SKYPE ADDRESS			
EMERGENCY CONTACT PERSON (and relationship to you)			
(phone and email for emergency contact)			
DATES OF AVAILABILITY BETWEEN 27 April and 2 November; (a minimum stay of 2 months is required)			
If accepted to the program, are you willing to sign a letter of commitment for the dates given above?			
I understand that, if selected, I will be required to meet all COVID-19 related requirements, including a health insurance policy that will cover my time in Panama.			
With this application form, please send the following:			
1.	Cover letter explaining your experience and suitability for this project.		
2.	CV or resume		
3.	Names and email addresses of two references who can attest to your field experience.		