NEW TRACKING PROJECT PROVIDES INTERESTING DATA ON MIGRATORY BEHAVIOUR AND HABITAT USE OF EASTERN CARIBBEAN HAWKSBILL TURTLES

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SUMMARY

In 2006, the Caribbean Conservation Corporation (CCC) formed a partnership with the Nevis Turtle Group and the Four Seasons Resort Nevis to establish a research and conservation project to study the migratory behaviour of critically endangered hawksbill sea turtles (Eretmochelys imbricata) nesting on the Caribbean island of Nevis in the West Indies. This poster summarizes the project results to date.

SEA TURTLE CONSERVATION ON NEVIS

Nevis lies in the North-Eastern Caribbean (See Figure 1), and despite threats including illegal take of nesting females and eggs, a seasonal turtle fishery based in neighbouring St Kitts, and habitat degradation from coastal development such as that proposed at the island’s principal nesting beach (Lovers Beach), it manages to retain a significant hawksbill population.

RESULTS

Since 2006, four female hawksbill turtles have been tracked from Nevis to various foraging grounds across the Caribbean (See Figures 3 and 4). Two distinct migratory behaviour patterns are apparent from the Nevis hawksbill population.

Two individuals remained within 100km of the nesting beach, settling in feeding grounds off St Bart’s and Montserrat (See Figure 3). The other two travelled more than 2,500km and remain in an area off the Miskito Coast of Nicaragua (See Figure 4).

All four turtles can be tracked on-line at www.cccturtle.org.

CONCLUSIONS

The project results are significant because they:
• Highlight the extensive migrations of Caribbean hawksbills.
• Reveal novel hawksbill feeding sites in the Eastern Caribbean that warrant further investigation.
• Support findings from previous studies that Nicaragua’s Miskito Cays are important foraging grounds for hawksbills from rookeries across the Wider Caribbean.

These findings will strengthen the case of conservationists working to develop regional strategies aimed at improving protection and enforcement at these vital hawksbill feeding areas.

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