

**BASTIMENTOS ISLAND NATIONAL MARINE PARK AND PLAYA CHIRIQUÍ:  
PROTECTED AREAS VITAL TO THE RECOVERY OF THE HAWKSBILL TURTLE  
(*ERETMOCHELYS IMBRICATA*) IN CARIBBEAN PANAMA**

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Bastimentos Island National Marine Park in Bocas del Toro Province, Panama, confers protection to four species of marine turtles, but it is particularly important for the conservation of the hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*). The park provides developmental and adult foraging habitat, serves as a mating area, and offers well-protected beaches for nesting. The park was created in 1988, and nest surveys conducted on the Zapatilla Cays in most years from 1990 through 2005 document an increase in hawksbill nesting activity. Hawksbill nest totals recorded in 2003, 2004, and 2005 are 82, 130, and 196. Favorable characteristics such as the lack of mammalian predators, absence of lights, and limited presence of humans contribute to high levels of nesting success and nest productivity as measured by careful nest inventories of nearly all nests. Playa Chiriquí, the most significant hawksbill and leatherback nesting beach in the region, has recently gained protected status as the Damani-Guariviara Wetland and is proposed for RAMSAR status. Hawksbill nest totals recorded in 2003, 2004, and 2005 are 389, 473, and 401. Threats from poaching and predators, especially dogs, are more difficult to address on this mainland beach, although progress is being made through significant community involvement in the turtle monitoring project.

Throughout the province, hawksbills are still threatened by harpoon fishers and lobster divers, and nests are subject to poaching. Bastimentos Island National Marine Park and Playa Chiriquí play a critical role in ensuring successful hawksbill reproduction in Caribbean Panama. The need for careful management of ecotourism is becoming evident at the Bastimentos Park, where daytime recreational use has increased dramatically. Long-term survivorship of this recovering population will depend on the social, economic and environmental sustainability of the region.