

SECTION 6: DEVELOPMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE FOR ECOTOURISM INITIATIVE AND ONGOING TURTLE CONSERVATION EFFORTS

As a major step towards the protection of marine turtles and increasing their importance on the island, one of the main aims of the current Darwin/FCO turtle project was to establish and leave in place an infrastructure for ecotourism. The definition we would use would be that ecotourism related to sea turtles in this case should be sustainable, low impact turtle watching which at the same time provides a venue for conservation education and assists in the generation of revenue needed for monitoring and conservation. The following achievements have been made to date:

Leaflets

Turtle information leaflets developed as part of the Darwin Initiative Turtle Project and produced by the FCO with assistance from Cable & Wireless are now distributed to all persons arriving on the island by the Police at each port of entry. These describe the biology, detail how to treat turtles and also give information as to how visitors can participate in a wardened turtle tour (below).



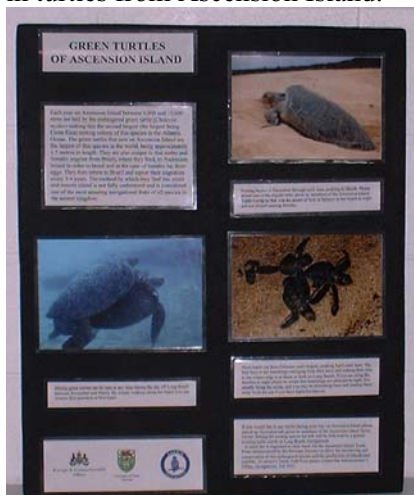
Photo 19: Leaflet produced



Photo 20: Turtle team 2001.

Display Boards

A display board is now in place at the Airhead. This is intended to provide information for visitors on arrival to the island on how to see mating, nesting and hatching turtles. It is possible for an additional copy of this display board to be placed at the Pierhead, the only other port of entry to the island, for the arrival of any passenger ships. A display board is also in place at the Turtle Ponds in Georgetown. This has historic information on the ponds and trade in turtles from Ascension Island.



Photos 21 & 22: Display Boards at Airhead and Turtle Ponds

Ascension Island Turtle Group (AITG)

The AITG has now been set up under the auspices of the Heritage Society. This is an all-inclusive group of resident volunteers and hourly paid part-time workers. The role of AITG is to carry out monitoring and conservation activities related to turtles including:

Beach monitoring

Collaboration with scientific research

Direct Action: Co-ordination of stranding network, clearing of thorn trees

Education: school visits, turtle wardening, the instigation of a Conservation Centre, designing and production of a web site as part of its umbrella organisation, the Heritage Society <<http://www.heritage.org.ac>>.

Turtle Wardening

A slide projector and screen have been purchased by the project and a set of slides with a script produced. This is complemented by a short educational video produced by the project. The show is now presented several times weekly by Turtle Wardens. Following the talk the group is taken down to Long Beach to watch turtles. A night vision scope has been purchased to aid turtle watching with minimum disturbance. Places on the slide show/tour can be booked via the Administrators Office. An advert now runs each week in the Islander Newspaper and has been inserted into the turtle leaflets distributed at the ports of entry. A fee of £2.50 is currently charged, with the aim to allow this venture to become self-sufficient.

Conservation Centre

The old Georgetown Bakery has been allocated to the AITG/Turtle Wardens and RSPB and AIG Conservation Officers for use as a Conservation Centre. Talks will now be conducted at this venue which can also house exhibits, educational material and merchandise which can be sold to help sustain conservation efforts.

Recommendations

It is recommended that these initiatives be encouraged to grow, thus facilitating several positive benefits including:

- Continued monitoring of the population status
- Gathering of data regarding threats
- Direct Action: Turtle rescue and Plant control
- Increased Public Participation and Awareness

THE FUTURE?

Ascension Island is entering into times of extreme change. This management plan will help Ascension Island Government put into place legislation and management that will safeguard and improve the status of Ascension Island green turtles. The presence of on-Island Conservation officers and the AITG equipped with sufficient knowledge and infrastructure to ensure this is carried out bodes well for this population.