SOS Tobago Annual Report
(Mar – Nov 2005)

“Conserving Tobago’s turtles and their coastal and marine habitat through community based initiatives in education, research and eco-tourism.”

2005 has been one of the most dynamic years for SOS Tobago and now with the nesting season now officially over, we would like to reflect on the successes, challenges and lessons learnt from this, our fifth season together as a group.

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2005 Activity Summary – Successes, Challenges, Lessons Learnt

Successes

Education
☐ Welcome turtle party and 2 beach clean ups held.
☐ 10 school lectures completed.
☐ 4 lectures completed for visiting school groups from Trinidad, Barbados and the US.
☐ 3 local youth groups complete 2-week training with lectures and patrols.
☐ Educational materials upgraded and expanded.
☐ Website upgraded and completed: www.sos-tobago.org

Patrols
☐ Regular patrols on the ‘index beaches’ from march 15 – august 15 alternating between 9pm – 3am patrols and 8pm – 1am / 1am – 6am shifts.
☐ 54 local youth volunteers trained and 15 sporadically active as weekend patrollers.
☐ 21 international youth volunteers trained and active for periods from 1 to 4 months.

Research
☐ Tagging training completed by 5 senior patrollers.
☐ 71 female leatherbacks tagged in two months
☐ Over 200 dead and deformed hatchlings collected for research at UWI by University of Glasgow volunteers (pic.1)
☐ 310 nests recorded, 276 leatherbacks, 34 hawksbill.
☐ Training manual upgraded, edited and published for use in patrol, tour guide and hotel staff training.
☐ National monitoring project

Eco-Tourism
☐ 17 tour guides participate in tour guide training
☐ Staff and security guard training completed for rex turtle beach and dominion security.
Weekly hotel lectures conducted at Rex Turtle Beach and periodic lectures at le Gran Courland.

Permanent signs erected on index beaches (pic.3)

21 international volunteers housed in community guesthouses

Challenges

Education
- Limited human resources made it difficult to really get into the rural areas
- Proposed bi-annual newsletter very time consuming and still incomplete.

Patrols
- Efforts limited by lack of human resources and funding
- Communications and transport costs significant and unfunded.
- Safety and security threats increasing with rising crime rates.

Research
- Continued poaching on index beaches and in the rural areas.
- Insufficient patrol coverage for the hatching period
- Low survival rates for hatchlings on index beaches due to heavy rains and human error (mtv incident etc.) (pic.2)

Eco-Tourism
- Lack of cohesion between government policy and practice.
- Lack of complete buy-in from hotel management
- Insufficient human resources to put constant pressure on hotels specifically and tourism industry in general.

Lessons Learnt /Future Strategies

Education
- Increase capacity to deliver through networking and paid staff.
- Complete key lectures and events early
Create more linkages for local youth groups with in SOS program areas and with the international universities through the student volunteers.

**Patrols**
- Secure funding early for patrols, communication, transport and incidentals.
- Create formal linkages with law enforcement authorities and conduct self-defense training early in season to reduce patroller risks.

**Research**
- Increase advocacy efforts in communities (pic.6)
- Secure human resources necessary to increase coverage in rural areas
- Increase patrol coverage during hatchling period
- Work with government to develop protected /prohibited area legislation on index and key rural beaches.
- Explore data gaps e.g. offshore foraging population of greens and hawksbills (pic.5)

**Eco-Tourism**
- Delegate specific, skilled human resources to this program.
- Go straight to the ‘top’, but also maintain good relations with the people in the field.
- Generate opportunities for positive pr as an incentive
- Work closely with tour operators, not just tour guides.
- Develop more organized volunteer schemes that interconnect with guesthouses and services within the community.

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**Figure 1 - 2 deformed hatchlings (1 normal size, abnormal head, 1 larger, white, abnormal head)**
Figure 4. DRAFT Sticker for Dive Boats, To Be Distributed With Data Sheets For Recording Sightings

Figure 5. DRAFT Poster for Villages, To Be Distributed Before Harvests
2005 Activity Breakdown

Education
With the generous support of the British High Commission, we were able to further develop our educational program this year.

Successes
- Welcome Turtle Party And 2 Beach Clean Ups Held
  The beach clean-ups, which were a joint effort with Environment TOBAGO (ET), targeted two of our three ‘index beaches; Turtle Beach and Grafton. Volunteers came from the community and refreshments were provided by Rex Turtle Beach Hotel for the Turtle Beach clean up. The "party", a small Saturday gathering of families and children on Grafton Beach, was a fun and educational event with games like the "Turtle Crawl Race" targeting children in the area. Lifeguards were on duty and lunch was provided from a caterer in the community, whose daughter eventually became a week-end patrol volunteer.

- Youth Program
  Over fifty youth participated in an intensive training program that comprised of two lectures and supervised fieldwork (see outline attached). Working with youth groups allowed us to target a wide cross section of students from many different high schools and to have the added supervisory role of their coordinators. We worked directly with the Southwest Rotoract Club, the Black Rock Police Youth Club and YEAH (Youth for Environmental Awareness of Habitats).

- School Lectures
  Lectures were delivered to key coastal schools in collaboration with Environment TOBAGO, visiting student groups from Trinidad and the US also participated in lectures and patrols. Additional lectures were carried out over the August holidays as part of the Tobago Literacy Unit children’s summer programme, the Barbados Environmental Groups summer programme and Environment TOBAGO’s high school teacher training programme.

- Educational Materials Upgraded
  At the start of 2005, we developed a full power point presentation for use in formal educational settings as well as a number of laminated photos and charts for display in non-formal settings. We were able to make full use of The Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Network’s (WIDECAST) recently released slide package and educational text with teachers guide this year. With the British High Commission funding we were able to purchase, at a greatly reduced rate, 15 textbooks, 6 teachers guides and 100 Sea Turtles of the Caribbean posters. The posters were distributed in the schools with the help of Environment TOBAGO and the texts were promoted as a reference and will be formally presented to key educators and information centers throughout the island.

- Website Upgraded and Completed
  The website was painstakingly reviewed and edited with the goal of making it a more accessible educational tool and a more lucrative fundraising resource. We initially worked with KhinkWeb in Tobago and the job is now being completed by Proudfoot Communications in Trinidad. Ashley Bakken, a volunteer with the College of the Atlantic in the US, produced an interactive
“kids’ section with quizzes and facts. Lauren Kirkland and Andrea Mason, return volunteers from the University of Glasgow also captured a wealth of turtle images and video clips for use on the website.

**Challenges**

- **Human Resources**
  A busier than usual nesting season with numerous advocacy challenges monopolized a great deal of our resources making it difficult to complete some of our target activities such as the high school resource pack and the mobile library display. However, the initial work on the high school resource pack will be completed in collaboration with ET as part of the teachers manual for their Secondary Schools Teacher Training programme. The mobile library display will be developed during the off-season for implementation during next years turtle season.

- **Bi-Annual Newsletter**
  The proposed bi-annual newsletter is in progress.

**Lessons Learnt**

- **Increase Capacity to Deliver through Networking and Paid Staff.**
  It is increasingly obvious that as our programmes grow, so too must our capacity to implement them. It is essential therefore that the volunteer teams be supplemented with paid staff, especially at the administrative level. There is also a clear need to sit down at the start of the season and share our educational resources with other educators at BRT, ET and within government as these larger organizations have the capacity to take the turtle conservation message deeper into the school system as part of their ongoing programmes allowing us to spread the focus beyond the formal institutions and into the non-formal realm. Volunteer spokespeople could also be another way of spreading the message, engaging prominent community leaders to speak out on issues.

- **Complete Key Lectures and Events Early**
  Lectures at key venues need to be completed before the nesting activity peaks, otherwise there is the risk of them not being completed at all or being rushed during the busiest nesting time, both options leading to unnecessary stress and reduced quality of delivery.

- **Create More Linkages for Local Youth Groups**
  There is tremendous energy and enthusiasm in the youth groups that could be more efficiently harnessed. Some possibilities that came up this year were 1) To have more events, off the beach, where our high school students could interact with the visiting university students, this would help with their confidence in dealing with the crowds on the beach, encourage the two groups to work together on the beach more than just having their little cliques and possibly even encourage their own further academic development. 2) Provide supervised accommodations in the Black Rock area either at the international students guest house or nearby for high school students from outside the area that want to help with patrols on week-ends i.e. afford them the same benefits as the visitors but have SOS cover that cost. 3) Use some of the education project funding to offer an internship for two school leavers per season, it would help with our manpower problems and offer them a once in a lifetime opportunity to develop their research and organizational skills.
Patrols:

Successes

- **Regular Patrols on the Index Beaches from March 15 – August 15**
  Despite our small patrol team, we were able to conduct regular patrols on the three Index Beaches for the duration of the nesting season. Patrols began operating on a 9pm – 2am watch at the start of the season and this was expanded to a split shift of 8-11.30 and 11.30-3 in May to better utilize the few committed volunteers who also had full time day jobs. However, following the loss of one leatherback at Turtle Beach in May, the patrol coordinator often remained out alone until 5am and/or there would be an additional 4am-6am shift implemented. With the arrival of the University of Glasgow volunteers in June, patrols ran from 8pm-1am and 1am-6am for the duration of the season.

- **Increased Presence of Local Youth Volunteers**
  Over fifty students from various youth groups (see Education) participated in “hands-on” patrol training this year. Of those initially trained approximately fifteen from the communities surrounding the beach, took an active interest in the patrols and continued to come out on weekends as patrol volunteers.

- **Increase in International Youth Volunteers**
  In addition to the ten University of Glasgow students who arrived in mid-June, there were also a number of other visiting youth that got actively involved in patrols. While one South African and one British national arrived on their own specifically to assist with SOS programmes, the majority came as part of an accredited university field excursion (e.g. College of the Atlantic, US) or an organized volunteer group here as part of a wider cultural or educational experience (e.g. MADventurer, UK).

- **310 Nests Recorded**
  This year’s total is the highest recorded for the Index Beaches since SOS began patrolling in 2000, which is in itself very exciting news especially for a season that started very slowly. In total 276 leatherbacks and 34 hawksbills were recorded nesting. However, it must be mentioned that these figures are also a reflection of the fact that coverage of all three beaches extended well into August for the first time this year and this was largely through the help of the University of Glasgow and our committed patrol team. In many years previous, external commitments would have made it difficult for full scale patrols to continue after July.

Challenges

- **Human resources**
  It would be ideal to maintain 8pm-6am patrols throughout the season, it is the only way to accurately monitor and protect nesting females and emerging hatchlings. These hours are impossible for otherwise employed volunteers to maintain and there are insufficient persons available or interested in being full time volunteers. This year, the patrol coordinator was offered a $1500/month stipend and a greater effort was made to reimburse patrols for related expenses such as cell phone cards and batteries with funds gathered from donations and T-shirt sales. This
helped with overall morale of the patrol team and ensured a stronger commitment. However, $1500 was really insufficient for an experienced patroller who was on at least six hours a night, five nights a week as it is a physically and mentally intense job that requires significant training and skill. Efforts to find a reliable funding source for annual patrols must continue.

- **Cost of Communications and Transport**
  In the past SOS members have covered these expenses out-of-pocket however, this year an attempt was made to regularly reimburse all out-of-pocket expenses so that a clearer picture could be formed of how much money it really costs to run the organization in a professional manner and these costs have proven to be significant but not insurmountable through strategic fundraising. (see Appendix I – SOS Financial Report 2005)

- **Safety and Security**
  The increase in drug abuse, especially in crack cocaine use, is an alarming trend that particularly impacts patrollers on Great Courland Bay (Turtle Beach) who often encounter addicts gravitating towards Plymouth, which lies just east of the beach. While most of them seem not to pose a direct threat to the patrollers, this trend combined with the increase in violent crime in Tobago is a major threat to the entire patrol programme. Most of our patrollers are and have always been female and the index beaches are in one of the areas (Mt. Irvine/Grafton) identified as a crime ‘hot spot’ in Tobago. The increase in unsolved violent incidents has made patrollers more wary and would be perpetrators more brazen. This was evident in an incident in early July when a group of aggressive, armed young men accosted a three person patrol team on our most secluded index beach, snatched a hawksbill away from right in front of them and ordered them to leave the beach ‘or else’. Their bold approach was unprecedented and indicative of a growing lawlessness in the area.

*Lessons Learnt*

- **Secure Funding Early for Patrols, Transport, Communication and Incidentals.**
  It is clear that paid patrols are absolutely necessary; the romantic ideal of an all-volunteer patrol team is unrealistic. We are optimistic that the government will be amenable to providing this funding in light of previous work done, a stronger environmental thrust in Tobago and stipends afforded in 2005 to the patrols in the Matelot region. Prior to this year this kind of government support had been reserved for patrols on “prohibited” beaches such as Matura/Fishing Pond and Grande Riviere. Inclusion of Matelot now sets a hopeful precedent for other patrols on open access nesting grounds such as those that we conduct in Tobago. Beyond the patrol stipends, the cost of communications and transport for patrols is significant and specific funding must be allocated to this in the future.

- **Reduce Patroller Risks**
  While we recognize that patrollers are operating at their own risk as volunteers, we are in the process of revising our emergency response procedures and see clearly that stronger ties are needed with the police to ensure that the patrollers safety is assured. Self defence and mediation training is also being considered as part of the regular patrol training to help the patrollers feel more at ease and to give them some tools to calm potentially explosive situations. We also recognize that our international volunteers are especially vulnerable because they are perceived
as ‘tourists’ i.e. easy targets. With funding to pay local patrollers, we will be in a better position to not only diversify the ethnic and gender make up of our patrol teams but also to increase the size of the patrol team throughout the season. These issues have been identified and discussed in the past but have unfortunately gained new urgency in the current social climate.

**SOS Patrol Shifts 2005**

March – May: 9pm – 3am + morning walks (minimum)
May: 8pm – 12am; 12am – 3am; 4am – 6am
June – July: 9pm – 1am; 1am – 5am
July – August: 9pm – 12 am + morning walks (minimum)

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<th>SOS Patrol LOG Mar 15 - Jul 31 2005: Patroller Nights Summary</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Name of Patroller</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gervais Alkins</td>
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<td>Giancarlo Lalsingh</td>
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<td>Tanya Clovis</td>
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<td>Sally-Ann Sinannan</td>
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<td>Duncan + Elaine (IND)</td>
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<td>University of Glasgow</td>
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<td>Wendy Herron (IND)</td>
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*IND=Independent*
Research:

Successes

- Tagging training completed
  In April 2005, we were able to send five persons to participate in a joint Nature Seekers(NSI)/WIDECAS workshop on community based turtle conservation in the Caribbean region at Matura. They were, our patrol coordinator (pc), Gervais Alkins, past coordinator and now assistant pc, Tanya Clovis, new volunteer recruit and Education Coordinator at ET, Giancarlo Lalsingh, patrol coordinator for Charlotteville/L’Anse Fourmi, Heather Pepe and Honourary Game Warden, Bobby Arthur. Participants were chosen based on their demonstrated commitment and their attendance was made possible by a generous donation by MADventurer, a UK based volunteer company as part of a previous volunteer agreement. It was an excellent opportunity to regroup as a patrol unit, to discuss plans for the season and to gather invaluable information in the classroom and critical tagging experience in the field.

- 71 Leatherbacks Tagged in two months
  As a result of the workshop, we were able to source tagging equipment through the WIDECAS Tagging Programme operating through the Barbados Turtle Project at UWI and NSI generously donated 200 Monel flipper tags. Although we got a late start, the results were significant in that we tagged 71 females in a two month period. This proved that the number of individual females nesting in the index area is greater than previously estimated suggesting that many of them may be more transient that originally assumed. This is similar to trends in other small islands that record the same females nesting at various sites on and around individual islands e.g. in 2004 we recorded two females that had been tagged in Grenada and in 2005 we recorded 8 leatherbacks tagged in Trinidad and 1 hawksbill tagged elsewhere.

- Over 200 Deceased Hatchlings Collected for Research at UWI
  With the assistance of PhD candidate, Suzanne Livingstone, University of Glasgow, clearer research methods were implemented for the collection of hatchling data. Nests that had completed hatching were excavated and the nest remains examined and recorded in terms of dead / deformed hatchlings, hatched / unhatched eggs. Hatchling specimens were fixed in formaldehyde and transported to UWI where they were examined as part of a University of Glasgow honours project. This was done in collaboration with Dr. John E. Cooper, Director of the UWI Veterinary School at Mt. Hope and hatchlings that were collected after the Glasgow group completed their expedition, went on to be used as part of his own study.

- National Tagging Program
  Central to the ability to properly manage sea turtle populations in Trinidad & Tobago is the identification tagging of all nesting females. Facilitating such identification tagging is the focus of a proposal currently being developed by Nature Seekers, Grande Riviere Tour Guide Association and SOS. Resources are being requested that enhance patrol coverage, equipment acquisition and enhance public education of the conservation efforts taking place on the beaches of Trinidad and Tobago, consistently for the next three years as a break in the tagging cycle will leave opening for error in population count, which will defeat the purpose of this scientific work.
Challenges

- **Continued Poaching on Index Beaches and in the Rural Areas**
  Rampant slaughtering of all species of nesting turtles continued this year on the rural beaches; in one week, six leatherbacks were killed on Cotton Bay in Moriah and this is indicative not just of the consistent presence of poachers on this remote beach but also of the high nesting numbers. SOS confirmed the slaughter of one leatherback on Turtle Beach in May and one hawksbill on Mt. Irvine Back Bay in June, as mentioned previously (see *Patrols*). We also received a number of unconfirmed reports that another leatherback had been taken in early April and another hawksbill in July, both on Turtle Beach. The timing of the leatherback events made it clear that poachers were monitoring our patrols and timing their activities. The lack of Honourary Game Wardens was a major blow to rural patrols this year and poaching was reported throughout the island.

- **Insufficient Patrol Coverage Throughout the Hatching Period**
  Despite the assistance from University Glasgow volunteers until the end of July, the late start of nesting meant late hatching and it was impossible to stretch our burnt out patrollers into September. We held many discussions with the hotel security at Turtle Beach about how to handle a hatching situation and circulated our contact information throughout the hotel to be called in case of emergency (i.e. disoriented hatchlings, day time emergences etc). This worked for a while in August but personnel changes at the end of the month resulted in many hatching events being mishandled by the hotel which we only found out about after irate tourists complained to their tour operators at home, we were never called by the hotel or the security. Obviously this is a situation that requires serious attention next year, as there is no point protecting the females while their offspring are placed at unnecessary risk.

- **Low Survival Rates for Hatchlings on Index Beaches**
  The lack of clear rules for temporary coastal structures made it possible for MTV to be given permission to erect a film set on Turtle Beach in the middle of nesting season with no prior consultation regarding the choice of location. This directly impacted on three leatherback nests and the activity at the set over the seven weeks that it was in place further impacted on an additional 13 nests laid in the area during that time. Absolutely no hatching activity was reported or recorded in that area this year, despite the fact that many of the nests reached full term while we were still on patrol. Without greater awareness on the part of the government authorities and the necessary legislation regarding our turtle nesting beaches or our coast in general, this situation could easily happen again.
  The consistent presence of ‘beach dogs’ on the hotel beaches was another tremendous challenge, their relentless assault on many full term nests led to hatchlings being dug out before their time and eaten or maimed. This happened at all hours and often by the time the dogs were found and chased away, the damage had already been done.
  We also lost a number of hatchlings to natural causes; an increase in development upriver caused the Courland River to widen and break its banks in the middle of Turtle Beach rather than at the end and with a great deal more force than usual, sweeping away at least 10 nests and making any further nesting impossible on the Plymouth end of the beach. Climate change is generally contributing to less finite rainy and dry periods, so nests are at greater risk from unseasonably extreme weather.
Finally, coastal lighting, particularly from Rex Turtle Beach and the adjacent Fisheries depot, continued to cause major disorientation for emerging hatchlings and the nesting females returning to the sea. Grey water runoff from the kitchens and utility sinks of every hotel along Grafton and Turtle Beach continued to contaminate the sand (and the sea) quite possible jeopardizing the health of the incubating nests below. Our work with the University of Glasgow and the University of the West Indies will hopefully give greater insight into our hatchling situation.

Lessons Learnt

- **Increase Advocacy Efforts in Communities**
  Greater community support is clearly necessary if turtle conservation is going to be successful in the long run. Turtle consumption is a long-standing tradition in Tobago and considered to be a significant part of the cultural heritage in some areas. Greater education is needed to encourage people to see the turtles as a significant and threatened aspect of our natural heritage as well. International disapproval does not always help the cause, the awareness and awakening must be allowed and encouraged to come from within. Possible strategies could include a media campaign (TV/radio/print), a “shock” poster campaign balanced with a softer, dialogue based approach utilizing the experiences/testimony of past poachers/consumers from within Tobago and perhaps from Trinidad as well.

- **Secure Human Resources, Community and Government Support Necessary to Increase Coverage in Rural Areas**
  Due to our consistent efforts and established presence in the Black Rock area, the rural beaches are sometimes overlooked when it comes to funding and patrols. We have come so far in our immediate area but the human resources have not really grown so our focus had remained limited to the index beaches. It is clear that we must take a more active role, before the season begins to encourage and facilitate the formation of community turtle watch programs in the key rural areas. Just by linking tour guides, honourary game wardens and students in these areas, there would already be a core team. The possibilities in this area must be more fully explored well before the nesting season starts. The necessary tagging equipment for hawksbills must also be obtained in time for the start of nesting in 2006 as the number of hawksbills nesting in Tobago is small but definitely significant, especially up the coast.

- **Increase Patrol Coverage during Hatchling Period and Address Dog Issue**
  Proposals are currently being developed for a hatchling specific patrol program that would incorporate the experiences and research carried out by the University of Glasgow with a summer field-training program for high school students. The hatchling patrols would be carried out during the earlier part of the evening and in the early morning to coincide with the peak hatching times. We have also made contact with a vet in Trinidad and are working on establishing a humane action plan for dealing with the beach dogs.

- **Work With Government To Develop Protected/Prohibited Area Legislation On Index And Key Rural Beaches**
  At a meeting in May with the Mr. Hilton Sandy, the Honourable Secretary for Agriculture, Marine Affairs and the Environment, the idea of “prohibited beaches” was raised. This has
always been flat out rejected by previous administrations so we were thrilled by Mr. Sandy’s interest. SOS Tobago would like to make it abundantly clear that it is in no way suggesting that the public use of any beach be impinged upon, simply that measures be put in place in a participatory, consultative manner, that would make it easier to manage these critical turtle nesting grounds as a valuable natural and cultural resource. We are already in contact with groups such as Nature Seekers, Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI), Wildlife Section, Forestry Division, MPUE, Trinidad and Richard Laydoo now at UNDP who was personally involved in the establishment of the protected beaches at Matura, Fishing Pond and Grande Riviere. They have all confirmed their commitment to assisting us in exploring our options as they realize the incredible benefits that the protected areas legislation has brought to their turtle conservation work and to the communities surrounding those beaches.

- Explore Data Gaps re: Offshore Foraging Population of Greens and Hawksbills
There is a tremendous opportunity to expand research efforts beyond nesting, as baseline data on the offshore population of greens and hawksbills is non-existent and critical to the open-season debate. A thorough study of the socio-economics of Tobago’s turtle fishery is long overdue and provides an excellent opportunity to work more closely with the fishermen and well as with UWI and the Fisheries Department.
**Eco-Tourism:**

*Successes*

- **17 Tour Guides Participate in Tour Guide Training**
  Due to a number of big events on the THA’s Tourism calendar such as the Caribbean Sustainable Tourism Conference, we were unable to get dates for the Tour Guide Training until the turtle season was almost over. The materials were therefore presented as a one-day introductory workshop to discuss issues and needs with the guides in preparation for a full three day session early next year.

- **Security Guard and Hotel Staff Training Completed**
  Meetings with Dominion Security and the duty managers of Rex Turtle Beach Hotel were held periodically throughout the season. This was partially successful in improving the way the turtles were dealt however a change in management and a change in security guards near the end of the season set us back somewhat and subsequently led to a number of less than satisfactory hatching incidents in late August and early September.

- **Hotel Lectures Conducted**
  Weekly lectures were conducted at Rex Turtle Beach from March to July and periodic guest sessions were held at Le Grand Courland and Grafton. This also improved beachfront behaviour and provided an excellent opportunity for broadening our international membership and selling T-shirts.

- **Training Manual Completed (see attached)**
  After much review both internally and through WIDECAST, the SOS Training Manual, funded by the Travel Foundation, was completed as a distillation of what has and has not worked for us. Covering everything from basic ecology, emergency response procedures, data collection, beachfront lighting etc. the text is oriented towards adults (tour guides, hoteliers, patrollers, other community watch programs) and is designed to develop skills in handling and managing nesting sea turtles.

- **Permanent Signs Erected on Index Beaches**
  The initial Travel Foundation funded signs, which alerted beach users on the index beaches to the presence of nesting turtles were replaced, by permanent signs with a nautical feel created by Roger Washington. These new signs are made of banner sheeting stretched across piping, so they are durable yet also replaceable and not as visually imposing as the traditional aluminum signs.

- **21 International Volunteers Housed in Community Guesthouses**
  Over the course of the nesting season, international volunteers contacted us about coming to Tobago. We placed them in small community guesthouses in the Black Rock and Pleasant Prospect area, filling rooms that may have otherwise been vacant during the traditionally quiet months of April – June. For one group of five girls, we also arranged that for meals to be prepared daily in their guesthouse by a small caterer on their street. These volunteers stayed for periods ranging from 4 weeks to 6 months, while most of them were British and in their late teens and early-mid twenties, we also had a middle aged couple who were passing through
Tobago on a year long sabbatical volunteering around the world and one South African. During their time here they were not only patrolling the beaches and interacting with people but also renting vehicles, purchasing meals, souvenirs, tours etc. Although they may not have been traveling with large budgets, we feel that they have made a significant economic contribution to the communities over the course of their stay, and the use of local goods and services, is something that we always emphasized in our orientation with them.

**Challenges**

- **Lack of Cohesion Between Government Policy and Practice**
  Despite identifying Tobago as an eco-tourism destination, the government seems to be unwilling to take the radical steps needed to really transform the public sector on a whole and the tourism sector specifically, into a ‘green, clean, safe and serene’ industry. One example of this was the decision to allow MTV to set up a film set on Turtle Beach in the middle of nesting season. The promise of international publicity and the assumed economic benefits were sufficient to convince the authorities to compromise the integrity of one part of Tobago’s main turtle nesting site, without giving any serious consideration to the opinion and experience of the people that have been monitoring turtle activity in the area for years. Furthermore, the entire production hired woefully few Tobagonians, even the maxi taxis used for transporting the cast and crew were ‘green band maxis’ from a Trinidad company. The show in question was a reality TV series which traditionally captures the dramas of a young cast in a party / ‘spring break’ kind of environment for an equally young audience. Promoting Tobago as a ‘spring break’ type destination seems totally at odds with the ‘green, clean, safe and serene’ mantra of the THA. The ensuing conflict between SOS, MTV and the THA served to highlight how inadequately prepared our reactive government is to stand up and act as pro-active force for change. Ironically, despite some public support for the MTV production there was also a great deal of public outrage and the entire situation did help to raise general awareness of the turtle conservation efforts.

- **Lack of Complete Buy-In from Hotel Management**
  A similar apathy exists in the private sector where managers often ‘talk the talk’ but shy away from doing any serious walking especially if it leads them in a different direction than their accustomed path. One example from this year is the Rex Turtle Beach Hotel, currently being operated as an all-inclusive. This hotel sits on Turtle Beach, it’s main marketing tool is the turtles but the current management seems unable or unwilling to implement any major changes to the current ad hoc ways of dealing with the turtles, even though there are examples worldwide of hugely successful hotels that have gone to great lengths to be as turtle friendly as possible and seen vast improvements in their customer satisfaction. Rex Turtle Beach is sitting on a veritable eco-tourism goldmine but without putting the proper measures in place with regards to lighting, wastewater run off and people management, they will continue to be plagued by guest complaints about the disruptive effect of their crowds and their lights and the dismissive attitude of their staff.

- **Conflicts between Tour Guides and Tour Operators**
  It is imperative that the tour operators buy in wholeheartedly to what we are doing and why; this year three tour guides raised their rates for turtle tours so that part of the cost would go back
to SOS, one tour operator didn’t understand this and for three weeks before we intervened, told all her clients that the tours were overpriced directly impacting on the livelihood of the guide.

Lessons Learnt

- **Delegate Skilled Human Resources to the Dealing Specifically with the Tourism Industry**
  There are a number of people within the industry with their hearts in the right place, but they lack the time, authority and resources to pursue the issues. As a non-governmental body, we are in a position to lobby, network with regional experts and go after funding that could address some of the issues that arise when turtles and tourism meet. However, this is such a vast area, that it really requires a specific person dedicated to working with the hotels, the tour guides and the government agencies on behalf of the turtles and their habitat.

- **Go Straight To The ‘Top’, But Also Maintain Good Relations With The People In The Field**
  In larger hotels, the manager is not always the one really in charge of policy decisions so the practical work will not get done unless there is buy in from the people who do i.e. the owner or Board of Directors. A greater effort must be made to reach these people, even if they aren’t ‘in country’ and the on site staff must be informed and included as much as possible.

- **Generate Opportunities For Positive PR As An Incentive**
  Genuinely positive examples are not always easy to find in today’s superficial eco-tourism climate. SOS is in a great position to support tour guides and operators that exemplify SOS eco-tourism objectives and an annual award ceremony would be one way to publicly congratulate those persons whose work has complemented our own. Being placed in the right environment with the right information can also encourage businesses whose operation has been less than turtle friendly. A Beachfront Lighting Workshop could be a good example of how a well publicized, hands on, educational event can be a platform for creating meaningful change within the hotel industry as was demonstrated at a similar event in Barbados some years ago.

- **Work Closely With Tour Operators, Not Just Tour Guides.**
  As more and more tourists arrive in Tobago as part of package holidays it is imperative that we work more closely with the tour operators. They are the ones that interact directly with the tourists, shaping their holiday and their choice of activities – the tour operators role as an information provider to the tourists cannot be underestimated.

- **Develop More Organized Volunteer Schemes**
  International volunteers have become a key part of what we do, their time goes into our patrols and their money goes into our communities, but they require a great deal of supervision and they have the potential to damage the organization if they are maliciously inclined. So far, we have been blessed to have had mainly good volunteer experiences but see where roles and responsibilities could be more clearly defined. A written contract / waiver must be signed with all volunteers to reduce the risk of potential conflict and they must be required to have adequate insurance coverage. On the other hand, we must also develop more organized schemes for bringing volunteers in, focusing particularly on the growing enthusiasm of mature / professional volunteers, connecting them with guesthouses and services within the community.
List of Meetings/Workshops/Events Attended:

- Fisheries Consultation on 1975 Fisheries Act (Turtle and Turtle Eggs Regulations), Tobago
- Incidental By-Catch Conference, Trinidad (sponsored by WIDECAST)
- Matura Tagging Training Workshop, Trinidad
- Oiled Wildlife Training Workshop, Tobago
- National Turtle Database Project with Nature Seekers, Matura, Fishing Pond and Grande Riviere (4 meetings and presentations in Trinidad).
- Buccoo Reef Trust; Sun, Sea and Science Workshop
- Environment TOBAGO; Teacher Training Workshop
- Sustainable Tourism Conference, Tobago
- STRAP Review, Trinidad (sponsored by WIDECAST)

Committees / Boards with SOS Representation

- Environment TOBAGO, Board of Directors
- Travel Foundation, Tobago Steering Committee
- Caribbean Regional Environmental Program (CREP) Tobago Stakeholder Board
- National Sea Turtle Database Project (partner)
- WIDECAST (country coordinator for Tobago)

Other Community, NGO or Youth Group Links

- Tobago Tour Guide Association
- Rotaract Youth Club
- YEAH Group – BRT
- Black Rock Police Youth Group

Academic Linkages

- UWI – Cavehill, Barbados Sea Turtle Project, Barbados.
- UWI – St. Augustine, Veterinary School, Mt. Hope, Trinidad.
- College of the Atlantic, Maine, USA.
- University of Glasgow, Scotland, UK.