Belize Turtle Watch Launches Adopt A Beach Program

The Belize Turtle Watch Program was launched in March 2011 with the goal of determining if climate change is impacting sea turtles in Belize. In order to monitor this change, a baseline data set on in-water abundance and nesting activity of sea turtles in Belize is needed. One part of this program is the 2011 Sea Turtle Census. The Sea Turtle Census consists of the In-Water and Nesting Beach Observation Programs where marine guides and coastal property owners record their observations of sea turtles. We are relying on interested businesses and individuals volunteer and report sightings of all sea turtles.

Adopt A Beach was launched in June 2011, along with ECOMAR’s Sea Turtle Census. The Adopt A Beach Program relies on costal property owners and protected area managers to Adopt Beaches and monitor them for signs of sea turtle activity and keeping the beach ‘turtle friendly.’ June through September is peak nesting season and we need your help to monitor the 100s of miles of beach that we have in Belize! Even if you adopt only a mile or less of beach, this will add to our database so please sign up now!

Contact Us about Adopting A Beach Today!
www.ecomarbelize.org/adopt_a_beach

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Adopted Beaches

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Belize Fisheries laws prohibit the harvest of sea turtles.
### Why Monitor Beaches?

Sea turtles use beach front and littoral forest to lay their eggs. Any tracks or nests need to be reported so that we have an idea as to how many turtles are nesting in Belize and where they are nesting. Help is needed in the monitoring of changes in beach patterns throughout the seasons and over the years. Turtles return to their “natal” beaches of their births to lay their eggs. If the beaches are receding or are inaccessible to turtles, their populations may decline. We may be seeing the last sea turtles if we don’t act today and ‘Protect Turtles Today, for Tomorrow.’

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### How to Monitor Beaches For Nesting Turtles

To monitor a beach, you simply walk the length of the beach on a daily basis. Ideally, the beach should be monitored in the early morning because turtles nest at night and when they crawl up the beach, they leave tracks that lead to the nest that can be covered by a rising tide or by foot traffic.

If tracks are seen, then evidence of successful nesting should be looked for. If a nest is found, it is important to measure its distance from the high tide mark. If possible, a GPS point should also be taken. Nests typically take approximately 60 days to incubate, after which hatchlings will emerge. Emerging hatchlings is an exciting event and guests of hotels and resorts will be excited to hear about it! If the hatchlings are not seen, remember that they leave small tracks, as well. Anytime turtle activity is seen, whether it be nesting on beaches, underwater, or stranded, turtles should be reported!

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### Making Your Beach Turtle Friendly

#### Keep it Clean.
Especially during peak nesting season, it is important to make sure that turtle nesting beaches are kept in a condition that promotes turtle nesting. Large items such as chairs, umbrellas and recreational vehicles left on the beach at night can obstruct a turtle crawling to nesting beach area and may prevent egg-laying, or the turtle may get stuck!

Picking up litter on the beach is also an important aspect of keeping the beach ‘turtle friendly.’ Litter left on the beach can cause harm to turtles crawling up on the beach and attempting to nest.

#### Lighting.
Artificial lighting disorients turtles so it is important to keep beach lighting to a minimum. If possible, beach lights should be switched off at night or at least, turned upwards rather than down towards the beach.

#### Dogs.
Dogs may harm or disturb nesting turtles. If you hear your dog barking at the beach, check it out. If there’s a turtle laying, tie up the dog to prevent it from disturbing the nesting turtle!

#### Do Not Approach.
If a turtle is seen nesting, do not disturb it! Keep quiet and move around slowly to avoid frightening her off. Do not approach a turtle as they crawl on to the beach and or while it is trying to lay eggs. Never shine lights or take flash pictures of a turtle nesting.

#### Help Us Protect Turtles Today for Tomorrow!

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Submit sea turtle observations online at ECOMAR’s website under “Submit Report.”

[www.ecomarbelize.org](http://www.ecomarbelize.org)

If you can, be sure to submit pictures along with your report!
Adopted Beaches

Ambergis Caye
Athens Gate
Rhonda Lawrence is on the beach early every morning and will monitor for nesting activity.

Bacalar Chico Marine Reserve
Belize’s northernmost protected area, which borders Mexico. There are roughly 8 miles of sandy beach that staff from Bacalar Chico and Hol Chan marine reserves regularly monitor for nesting activity.

Casa Tortuga Villa
Peggy Mason says that sea turtles have not nested on their beach for over 40 years, but will be more than happy to monitor the natural beach area that they have.

El Pescador Lodge & Villas
Alissa Flota has seen only one turtle nest on their beach in the past 15 years. The nest was laid on July 7th, 2007 and had over 100 eggs, but only a dozen or so hatched due to Hurricane Dean.

The Turtleman’s House
Rosemary Ingram Smith walks a mile of beach every day and has been monitoring sea turtle activity for years along with her husband, Greg Smith, who spearheaded research on important nesting beaches in Belize in the 90’s.

SunBreeze Hotel & Suites
Julia Edwards, located at the heart of town has seawall in front of their property, so has not seen any signs of turtles in these areas for 15 years but would like to help conserve turtles.

Blue Tang Inn
Fanny Herstig is excited to begin monitoring their beach for nesting activity.

Hopkins
Lebeha Cabanas
Dorothy Petterson is unsure if turtles nest on their beach, but is excited to participate in monitoring for nesting activity!

Jungle Jeanie by the Sea
Jean Barkman knows that sea turtles have nested on their beach in the past but is unsure of the frequency.

Placencia Peninsula
Robert’s Grove Beach Resort
Jean-Marc Tasse knows that turtles have nested on this beach in the past, but is not sure of the frequency.

Villa Topsy Gecko
Javier Duenas adopted an area of Maya Beach and is not sure if sea turtles nest on the beach but will begin monitoring for nesting activity.

Green Parrot Beach Houses
David Allardice adopted an area of Maya Beach and is not sure if sea turtles nest on their beach.

Colibri House
Stefano Ragagnin has two properties, one in Placencia and one in Punta Negra. A few years ago, he found a small sea turtle on his beach that was injured and did not survive. He and his business partner will monitor their properties for sea turtle activity.

Offshore Cayes
South Water Caye
Jennifer McDougall of International Zoological Expeditions has adopted the beaches on South Water Caye which is the namesake for South Water Caye Marine Reserve. Jennifer reports that turtles nest regularly on the island.

Royal Belize Reception
Private caye with seawall surrounding the entire caye, so no beaches are available for nesting turtles however, they will assist with ECOMAR’s other monitoring programs such as Adopt-A-Reef and monitoring for turtles in-water!

Miller’s Landing Resort
Ms. Antionette Miller walks her dogs on the beach every day and has not seen any turtles on their property for the past 18 years and does not believe she has seen any tracks either.

Lighthouse Reef Atoll
Half Moon Caye was designated a National Monument in 1982 and later became part of the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System World Heritage Site. It’s sea turtle activity is being managed by the Belize Audubon Society. Sea Turtles regularly nest on this island.

Reef’s End Lodge
Located on Tobacco Caye, it has been years since they have seen sea turtles nesting on their property due to too much artificial lighting. However, one year in the past they had up to 13 nests on the caye!

Corozal
Bayside Guest House
Karen Heaps says that the area around their property is a permanently submerged rocky part of shoreline that reaches the town seawall, so turtles do not nest in that area, but will still monitor for turtles.

Serenity Sands Bed & Breakfast
They have never seen turtles nest on their property. However, they know that fisherman used to catch sea turtles in that area and have 2 dogs, which may deter turtles from coming onto the beach.

Almond Tree Resort
Lynn Carpenter reports that she does not believe turtles nest on their small beach in Corozal Bay but will monitor the surrounding water for any sea turtles.

Thank you to everyone for supporting the Adopt A Beach Program!
PACT-Serenity racing for the water’s edge upon release! She moved so fast, she left a huge wake behind her!

Olive is an olive ridley turtle that was found entangled discarded fishing net near San Pedro, Ambergris Caye. She had cuts on both front flippers, deforming the left front flipper and causing a puncture wound in her right front flipper upon her arrival at the Hol Chan Marine Reserve Office. She was unable to dive down when she was initially found but was rehabilitated by biologists and rangers from both Hol Chan and Bacalar Chico Marine Reserves. Hawksbill Hope recognized the importance of tagging this first observation of an olive ridley in Belize and donated a satellite tag to Olive on her release. Olive was released at Tres Cocos dive site on August 8th, 2011. Since that time, she has traveled over 635 miles and is in the middle of the Gulf of Mexico. Go Olive Go!

Climate Change Theory
Supporting our theory that climate change will impact sea turtles, we have received reports of olive ridley turtles in Mexico and Cuba. In 2007 and April 2011, two olives were found stranded on beaches in Mexico by Mr. Roberto Herrera. Felix Moncada from Cuba reported an olive ridley in 2009. In addition reports of turtles ‘with many shields on their shells’ have been reported in Isla Mujeres Quintana Roo, suggesting this may be a feeding ground for these turtles. Because olive ridley turtles have not previously known to be distributed to these areas or Belize, this is evidence that climate change may be impacting the range of these turtles!