

# VELADOR

Using Science-based Conservation to Protect Sea Turtles and their Habitats since 1959

Issue 2, 2006

## Native Panamanians Partner with CCC to Protect Sea turtles at Chiriquí Beach



Dan Evans / Caribbean Conservation Corporation

Initiated in 2003, the Chiriquí Beach, Panama, Leatherback and Hawksbill Turtle Project is already a glowing success. In June 2006, the project took another huge step forward with the signing of a landmark agreement between the Government of Panama, the local Ngöbe-Buglé indigenous community and the Caribbean Conservation Corporation. Meanwhile, the research component of the project continues to uncover exciting information about

poorly understood, yet globally significant, nesting populations of leatherback and hawksbill turtles, both considered *critically endangered*.

This June, a contingent of CCC representatives traveled to Chiriquí Beach, along with members of Panama's National Environment Authority (ANAM) to formalize a three-way agreement between CCC, the Panamanian government and the Ngöbe-Buglé people.

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for sea turtle news,  
information, alerts or to  
Adopt-A-Turtle!

**...from cover**

Though all three parties have been working together on various facets of the project since it started three years ago, it wasn't until last month that a formal agreement could be finalized and signed in person by leaders representing each group. To celebrate the signing of the agreement, the community held a public reception

complete with traditional singing and dancing, followed by a community feast. Several hundred local citizens assembled in the decorated town center to hear speeches by each of the project partners. CCC Executive Director David Godfrey thanked the community for their hospitality and for their commitment to the goals of the project. Local school children and young adults performed traditional songs and dances celebrating the bounty of the Earth and reinforcing the need to protect life sustaining natural resources.

In signing the agreement, the Ngöbe-Buglé leaders committed to



Ngöbe-Buglé children preform a traditional dance celebrating the Earth as part of the signing ceremony.

• CCC, through the project's field  
• coordinator, Cristina Ordoñez, will  
• coordinate all activities with the  
• Ngöbe-Buglés and ANAM, while  
• also providing training and jobs for  
• local community members interested  
• in working on the project. With over  
• a dozen full-time turtle surveyors,  
• boat captains and cooks, this project  
• already is a primary source of  
• employment and training in the  
• region. In addition to turtle research  
• and recovery, part of the project's  
• mission is to help the community to  
• replace revenue derived from non-  
• sustainable turtle consumption with  
• sustainable eco-tourism that  
capitalizes on the robust local  
turtle populations and the  
incredible diversity of remote  
tropical wilderness around  
Chiriquí Beach.

The Ngöbe-Buglé people have lived in this region of Panama for thousands of years and have a long-standing traditional use of sea turtles for subsistence as a source of revenue for the community. The community has recognized, however, that hawksbill populations have dwindled

• considerably and that a more  
• sustainable source of income might  
• be established through the protection  
• and recovery of this species. In an  
• interesting quirk of local tradition, the

supporting all the goals of the project, especially the goals to protect and recover sea turtles. CCC was also granted official access to this remote, semi-autonomous region of the Caribbean coast of Panama.



A hand shake after signing the agreement seals the deal between the project partners.

## VELADOR {bel.a.dor}

In Caribbean cultures, *Velador* translates as "one who stands vigil" — originally referring to turtle and egg harvesters who waited at night for turtles to come ashore. Now CCC claims this title for its newsletter, and around the Caribbean, CCC's researchers and volunteers are replacing poachers as the new veladors.

*Velador* is published for members and supporters of the nonprofit **Caribbean Conservation Corporation (CCC)** and its **Sea Turtle Survival League (STSL)** program.

CCC is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the conservation of sea turtles through research, training, advocacy, education and the protection of habitats. STSL is the US-based outreach, policy and education program of the CCC.

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Ngöbe-Buglé hold the leatherback turtle in very high esteem as an important symbol of fertility. As a result of this belief system, the local population of leatherbacks have faced very little disturbance by man.

This, combined with the highly remote location of Chiriquí Beach, has allowed the leatherback population to thrive. The project's early nesting studies have found this beach to host one of the top four nesting aggregations of leatherbacks remaining in the world. By working closely with the community and government officials to protect the nesting beach and reduce the harvest of hawksbills in the region, this project stands a real chance of recovering this greatly imperiled species, while also protecting the robust leatherback colony.

While at Chiriquí Beach, CCC researchers deployed two satellite transmitters on leatherbacks after they completed nesting. This increases to five the total number of leatherbacks tracked from this beach. Regularly updated maps depicting these turtles' movements can be accessed for free on CCC's website at [cccturtle.org](http://cccturtle.org). Previous tracking studies found that some of the leatherbacks nesting in this region traveled into the Gulf of Mexico, where they appeared to reside for most of the year to forage. Still others from this beach traveled east



CCC's Cristina Ordoñez (center) leads the attachment of a satellite transmitter to a nesting leatherback sea turtle.

through the Caribbean and into the open north Atlantic before their transmitters ceased to transmit. This latest tracking project is supported by the Maritime Aquarium in Norwalk, Connecticut, Shark Reef Aquarium in Las Vegas, the Disney Wildlife Conservation Fund and the World Wildlife Fund.

The Chiriquí Beach project is a component of a larger Caribbean Panama sea turtle conservation program, which is carried out and supported by a diversity of NGOs and government agencies. Some of the main project partners include the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, Drs. Anne and Peter Meylan (Wildlife Conservation Society), World Wildlife Fund and

the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Local partners include ANAM and the Ngöbe-Buglé Comarca.

As part of the long-term nest monitoring conducted under this program, eight different nesting sites in the immediate vicinity of Chiriquí Beach are monitored throughout the year. During 2005, CCC and project partners Anne and Peter Meylan documented a total of 695 hawksbill nests and 4,775 leatherback nests—making Chiriquí Beach and its adjacent nesting sites some of the most important turtle nesting habitat in the world for both species. 🐢

By David Godfrey

## International News



### Marine Turtle Conservation Act Funding Update

In 2004, the Marine Turtle Conservation Act was signed by President George W. Bush providing support for protection, research, and education efforts in developing countries where resources and capacity are limited. In the first year the fund received \$100,000 and \$700,000 in its second year. In May, 2006, the U.S. House of Representatives appropriated \$700,000 for the Marine Turtle Conservation Fund (MTCF). In July, CCC was informed that the U.S. Senate has appropriated \$1 million for marine turtles! The final outcome for Fiscal Year 2007, which runs from October 1, 2006 through September 30, 2007, will not be known until the differences between the Senate and House bills are resolved in a conference committee meeting sometime later this year.

The good news is that the MTCF should have a minimum of \$700,000 for the next program cycle, and, if the House accedes to the higher Senate mark as it did last

year, the program will receive \$1 million.

Many thanks to all those who contacted their legislators to let them know how important the MTCF and other Multinational Species Conservation Funds (for great apes, rhinos, tigers and elephants) are to the survival of these species.

During the last funding cycle, only 25 proposals of 78 submitted to the MTCF were funded because the program simply didn't have enough money to fund all the proposals. Included among the projects funded is CCC's Chiriquí Beach Project.

The number of proposals submitted to the MTCF demonstrates the need for international sea turtle support. As the global sea turtle community continues to demonstrate its need, the program support within Congress will continue to grow. With this growth, more worthwhile projects will be funded. 🐢

By Marydele Donnelly

# CCC's Sea Turtle Tracking Program Celebrates Its 10th Year



As the Caribbean Conservation Corporation (CCC) celebrates the 10<sup>th</sup> year of its successful Sea Turtle Migration-Tracking

Education Program, which allows children and other Internet users around the world to watch the mysterious migrations of sea turtles being tracked by satellite, over 10 new sea turtles will be added to the migration-tracking section of CCC's website. CCC began the international trend of tracking sea turtles on the internet for educational purposes. In the years since launching its program in 1996, CCC has been honored to see so many groups and institutions using the model it created to reach larger and larger audiences.

Since its launch, CCC's education program has continually expanded, now boasting online visitors from 161 countries around the world. The site receives an average of over 61,000 hits every day, and last year it surpassed 16 million hits received.

As part of the program, CCC developed a free Educator's Guide that can be downloaded from the website. Currently, there are over 15,000 teachers, representing over 450,000 students, who have

registered to receive the Educator's Guide. Thousands of these guides have been given out at events or distributed by other organizations and agencies as a valuable educational resource. It has been translated into four different languages. The Sea Turtle Migration-Tracking Education Program has involved over 150 sea turtles, representing nearly 30 research projects.

“This education program combines the mystery of sea turtle migration with state-of-the-art technology to raise awareness and support for sea turtle conservation,” said David Godfrey,

CCC's Executive Director. “It has become CCC's most effective tool for reaching people with information about sea turtles, and its effectiveness has given rise to dozens of similar online programs around the world.”

To utilize this free program or to adopt a satellite-

tagged turtle, call the CCC at 1-800-678-7853 or go directly to our website at

[www.cccturtle.org](http://www.cccturtle.org). Teachers wanting to incorporate the program in their school curriculum can register online to download the free Educator's Guide with background information, worksheets and ideas for fun, educational classroom activities.



Tracked in 1996, "Samantha" became the first sea turtle tracked "live" online.



Tagged in June, 2006, "Ibélíce" is the most recent sea turtle to be tracked online by CCC.

CARIBBEAN



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