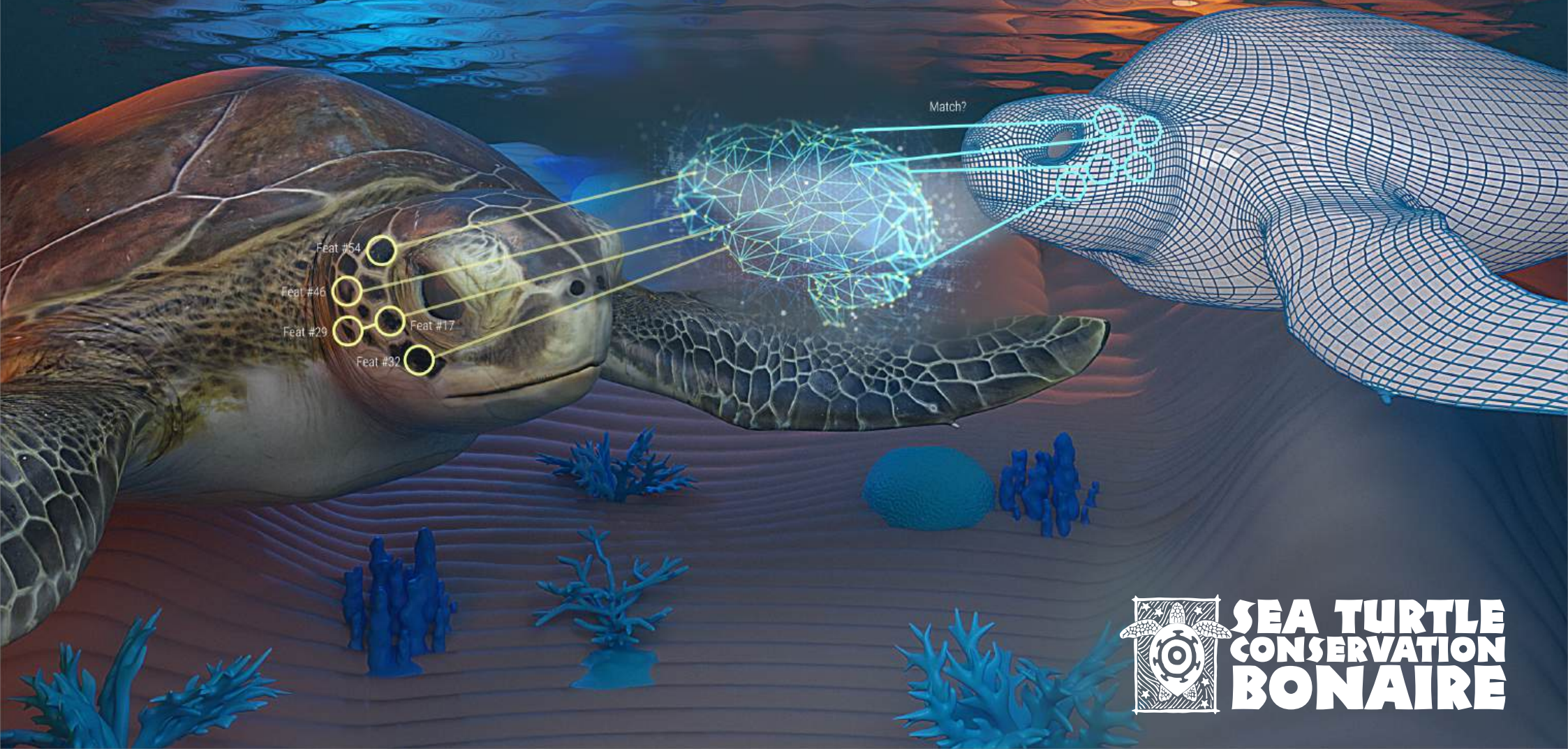


BONAIRE

# TURTLES: MATCH ME IF

# YOU CAN

STCB YEAR REPORT 2023



Feat #54  
Feat #46  
Feat #29  
Feat #17  
Feat #32

Match?



**SEA TURTLE  
CONSERVATION  
BONAIRE**

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## BONAIRE TURTLES STCB YEAR REPORT 2023



### STAFF

**Kaj Schut - Manager**  
**Daan Zeegers - Field Coordinator**  
**Floor van Schalkwijk - Communications and Fund development**  
**Gielmon "Funchi" Egbreghts - Field Technician**

### INTERNS/RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

**Joep de Koning**  
**Abigail Petrich**  
**Djura Boonstra**


### CONSULTANTS

**Dr. Frank Rivera-Milán**  
**Eric van de Keuken, Administratiekantoor Brandaris B.V.**  
**Fernando Simal, WILDCONSCIENCE B.V.**

### STCB BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2023

**Ger Bakker - President**  
**Rob Hulsbergen - Treasurer**  
**Vera Maartens**  
**Jurgen Pfalz**



CALL OUR DEDICATED  
**HOTLINE: +599 780-0433**  
SAVE A SEA TURTLE!  WHATSAPP AVAILABLE TOO

PLEASE REPORT TURTLES IN TROUBLE TO OUR HOTLINE.



Editorial design: **Bonsai**

Text: Kaj Schut & Floor van Schalkwijk

Cover: Illustration by Juan Riveros

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## WE'RE ON A MISSION!

Sea Turtle Conservation Bonaire's mission is to ensure that Bonaire's sea turtles have a secure future, and to connect people to sea turtle conservation in ways that inspire caring for nature.

Together with dedicated staff and volunteers, we focus on research and monitoring, education, advocacy and collaboration to protect sea turtles on Bonaire and in our region.

## EDUCATION IS KEY

An important part of our work is education and outreach. Every year, STCB organizes at least 24 presentations for the general public. Everybody is welcome during these presentations to learn about the sea turtles of Bonaire and their habitat, and how our work helps to protect them. We believe that an important part of conservation is to simply inform people about the importance of sea turtles and their interconnectedness with different ecosystems.

Besides informing the general public, we also organize presentations on request and presentations at schools. In 2023, we presented at 8 different schools for students between the ages of 6 and 20.



49  
PRESENTATIONS  
IN 2023  
600  
PEOPLE REACHED

## RETIREMENT FUNCHI

After 20 years of dedication and work for STCB, we said goodbye to our turtle friend Funchi while he goes and enjoys his retirement. We are proud to say that he has worked for STCB for so long and that he dedicated so much of his time, knowledge and efforts to the sea turtles of Bonaire. He started as first full time employee of STCB and was trained by Robert van Dam.

We will miss Funchi, but hope that he will enjoy his retirement and that he is willing to help us here and there if we ever need his expertise.

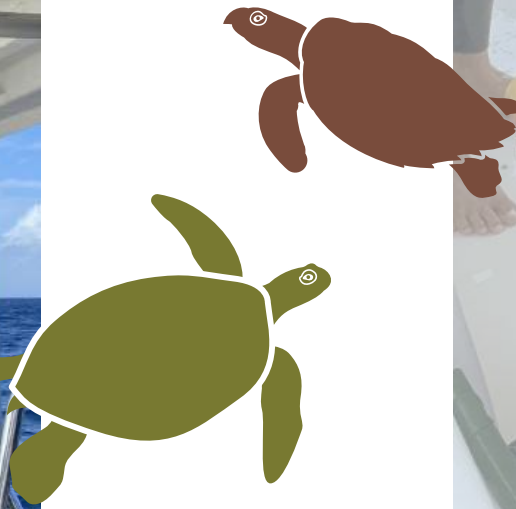
“  
I will not forget STCB quickly,  
it will always be in my heart.  
”

FUNCHI ABOUT HIS RETIREMENT

## TRANSECT-COUNT SURVEYS

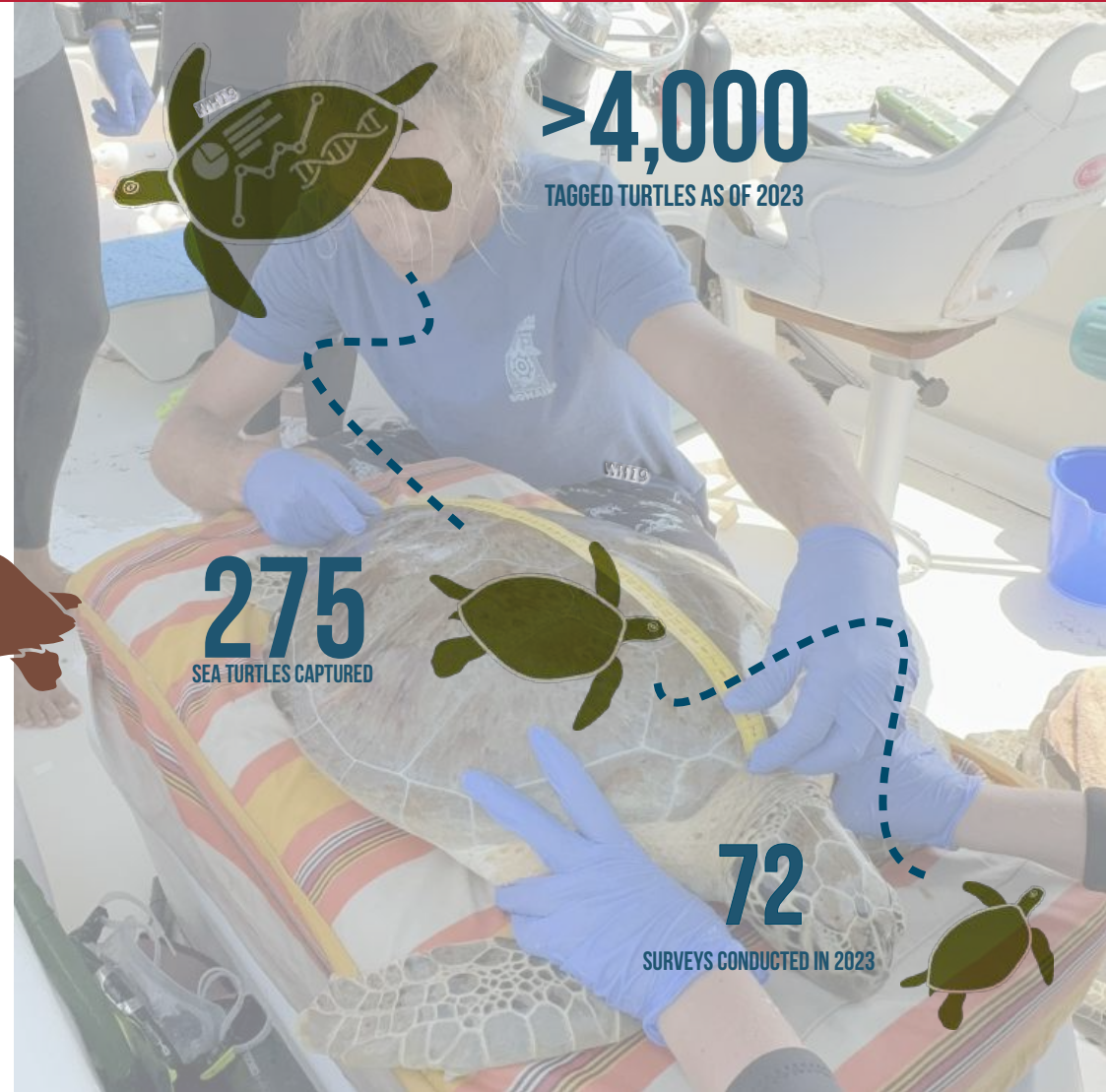
Transect-count surveys are one of the scientific methodologies that we use to collect data on resident populations of green and hawksbill sea turtles. This data allows us to estimate yearly sea turtle abundance and long-term population trends.

In 2023, 108 surveys were conducted on the west coast of Bonaire and around Klein Bonaire by STCB staff and volunteers. For each sea turtle detected, observers recorded species, size, time, location and behavior. Sampling around Klein Bonaire and along the west coast was completed between January and the start of April. Although both green and hawksbill turtles were observed island-wide, counts of greens were much higher than hawksbills at all sites. In total, observers recorded 276 green and 16 hawksbill turtles during the 2023 surveys.



# 756 KM SWAM

7 OBSERVERS X 108 X 1-KM TRANSECTS



**>4,000**  
TAGGED TURTLES AS OF 2023

**275**  
SEA TURTLES CAPTURED

**72**  
SURVEYS CONDUCTED IN 2023

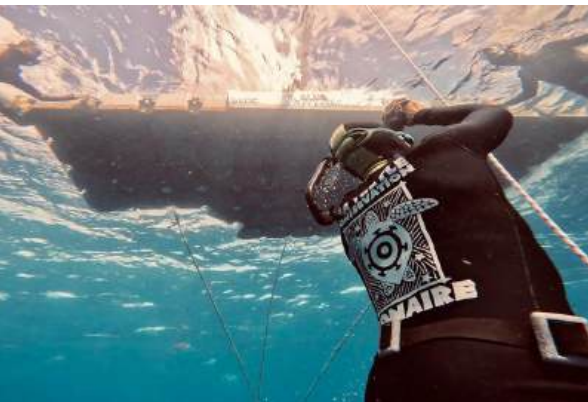
## NETTING IN 2023

During 2023, staff and trained volunteers conducted 72 netting sessions at Lac Bay over six one-week periods between June and December. A total of 170 juvenile and sub-adult green and one adult male loggerhead turtle were captured, weighed, measured and tagged. This included 41 recaptures, turtles that had already been captured during previous capture-mark-recapture efforts. Data from these turtles can tell us more about the growth rates of our resident sea turtles.

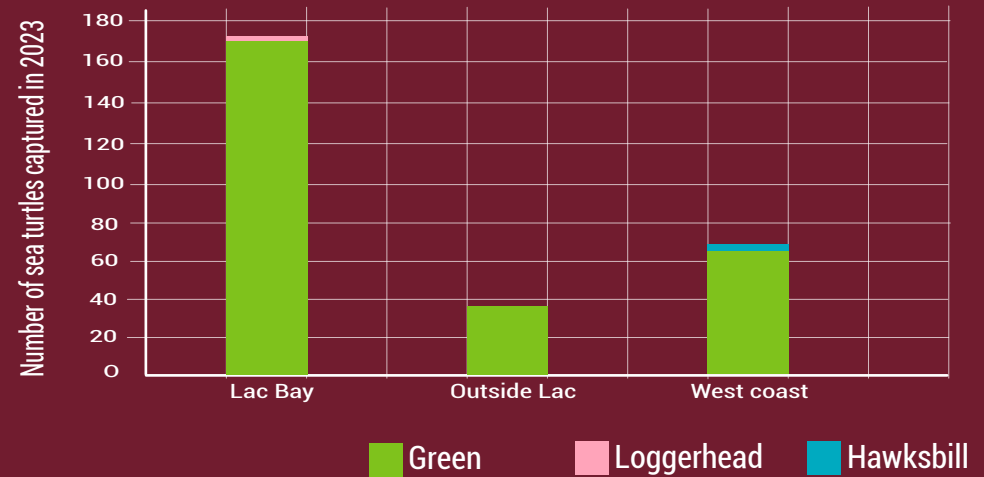
## WEST COAST AND OUTSIDE OF LAC CAPTURES

We constantly try to improve our in-water surveys for better data collection and for a safer environment for our staff and volunteers. In 2023, our volunteers and staff completed their freediving courses with Blue Classroom. The aim of these courses was to learn how to best support STCB staff or trained volunteers when conducting in-water surveys and how to ensure their safety above and below water.

These courses were a great tool during our west coast captures in April, during which we collected data from 49 sea turtles. Besides collecting data on the west coast, we also started collecting important capture-mark-recapture data outside of Lac Bay. During a total of 6 east coast sessions, we were able to collect data on 35 sea turtles.

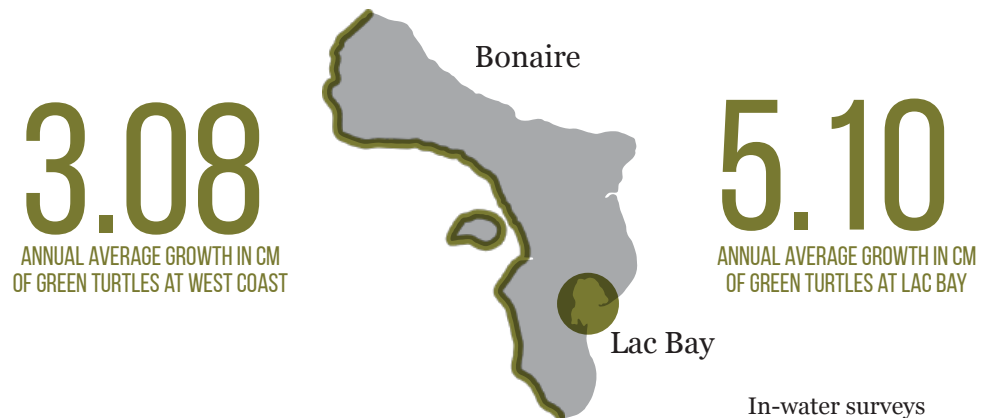


Bar plot of number of sea turtles captured in Lac Bay, outside of Lac and along the west coast



## WEST COAST VS LAC BAY

By combining the data collected during these in-water surveys, we can get an insight in some interesting trends. One important long term trend that we found is the difference in growth rates between the west coast of Bonaire and Lac Bay. Sea turtles foraging in Lac Bay generally grow faster than sea turtles foraging along the west coast of Bonaire. In 2023 we can see a significant difference in the annual average growth rates of green turtles captured along the west coast and in Lac Bay. Soon we hope to be adding the outside of Lac to this data by continuing the data collection on the east coast.



## IMPORTANT RECAPTURES IN 2023

In 2023, we had a total of 67 recaptures. Most of the turtles were (re)captured in Lac Bay or just outside of Lac. Only 18 of the recaptures were captured along the west coast including at Salt Pier, 1000 steps, Klein Bonaire and Cliff.

Recaptures provide us with important data. The importance of recapture data was underlined in 2023 when we received a report about a green turtle with tumors on its front flippers. This was the first report of a sea turtle with fibropapillomatosis (FP) along the west coast. When we located the turtle and looked up the tag information, we discovered that this turtle had already been captured three times in Lac Bay, in 2021 and 2022. Moreover, the first two times it was captured (in 2021), this turtle showed no signs of FP tumors. In 2022, however, we received a report of this turtle at the Salt Pier, with tumors. Therefore, this recapture data not only provided information on movement patterns, but also on the spread of diseases like FP. With the help of this data we can monitor juvenile green turtles and their health status around Bonaire over an extended period of time.



## IMPORTANT CAPTURES IN 2023

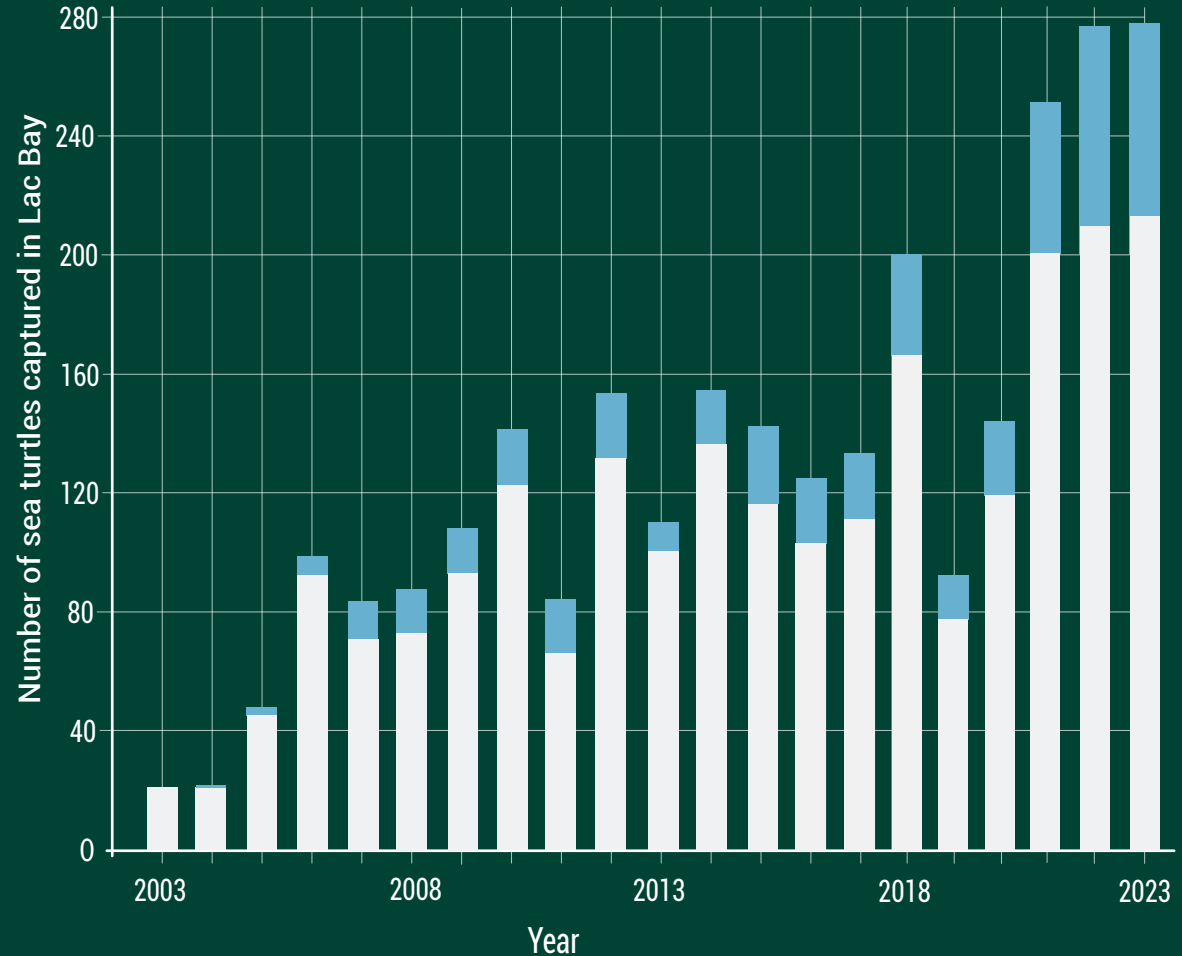
During our capture-mark-recapture in Lac Bay we find predominantly green juvenile turtles. They forage in the Bay because of the high availability of sea grass. This is why we were surprised to have a loggerhead turtle swim into our net in November of 2023, and even more surprised to find out it was a male adult loggerhead. This loggerhead had a carapace size of 87 cm and a weight of 82 kilos. A few weeks after this amazing data collection, we received messages about the same loggerhead swimming along the west coast. We think this might be a male adult that lives on Bonaire.

## RECAPTURES

Recapture(s) of individually marked sea turtles provide us with valuable information for their conservation. This includes growth rate, approximate age, presence/absence of disease, human and/or natural induced injuries and overall health of the resident population. Additionally, by taking DNA samples of captured turtles, we get a better insight in the distribution and composition of Caribbean sea turtle populations. Statistical modeling, based on 16 years of net-capture surveys in Lac Bay (2003-2018), shows that green turtle numbers are slightly increasing in this area.

**Number of sea turtles (green & hawksbill) captured in Lac Bay during net-capture sessions conducted between 2003 and 2023, with the number of recaptures in blue.**

The average recapture rate in Lac Bay is 19.1 per cent.

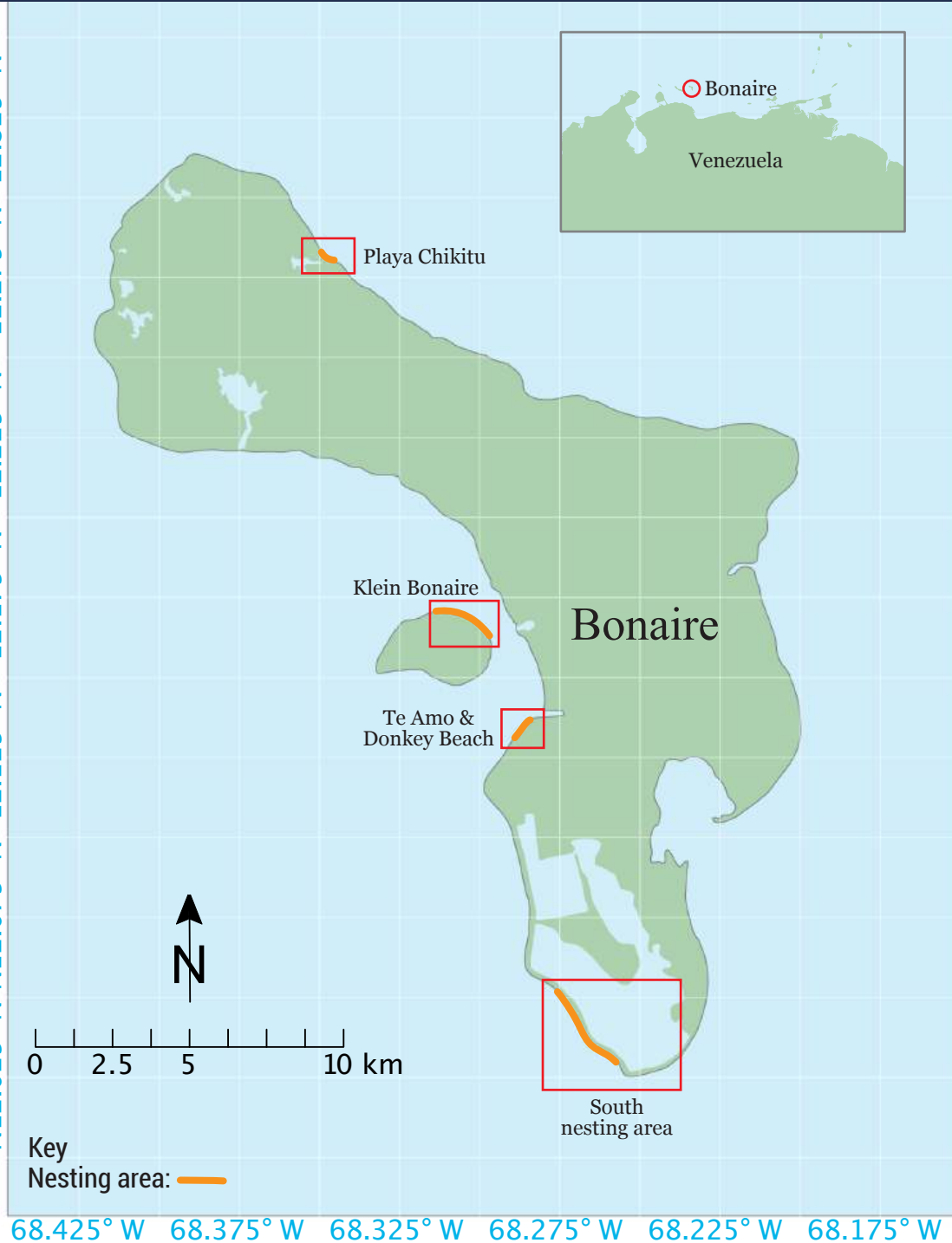


## THE JOB

Between May and December, every morning staff and volunteers patrol the beaches most used by nesting turtles to record activities, including false crawls (unsuccessful nesting attempt, no eggs laid), confirmed nests (eggs were located) and suspected nests (eggs could not be observed, but site disturbance suggests that a nest was laid). Finally, after each hatching event, the nest is excavated and an inventory of the contents is made to calculate hatching success.



N12.025° N N12.075° N 12.125° N 12.175° N 12.225° N 12.275° N 12.325° N



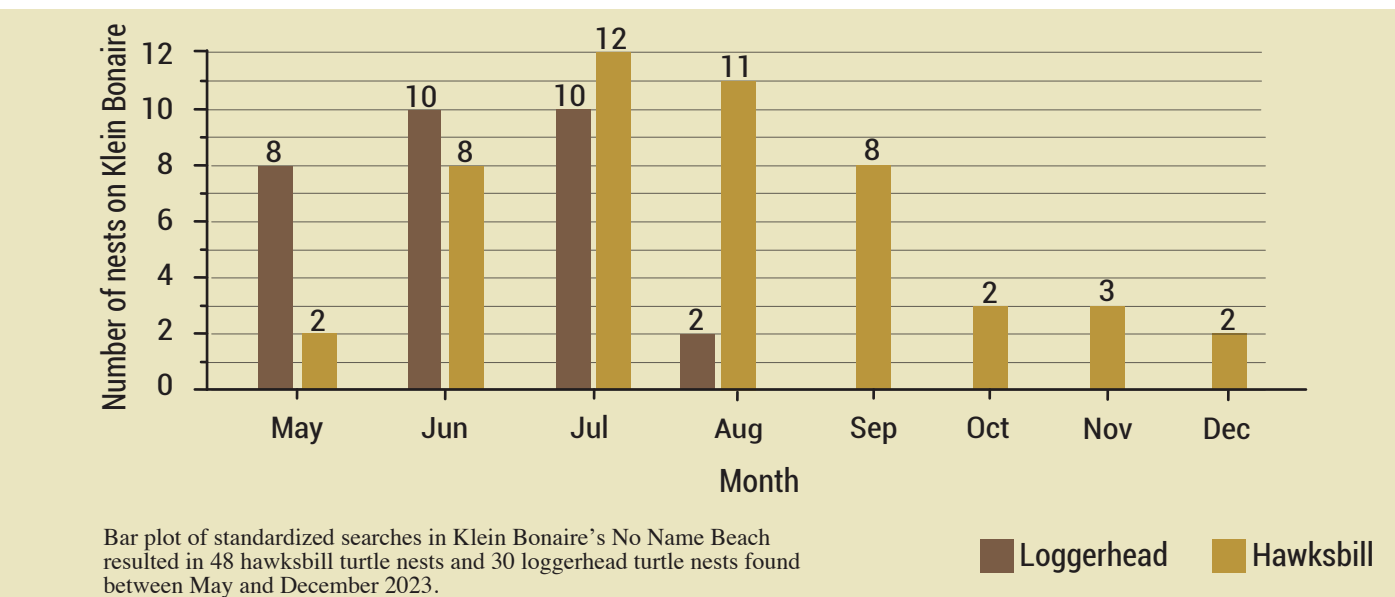
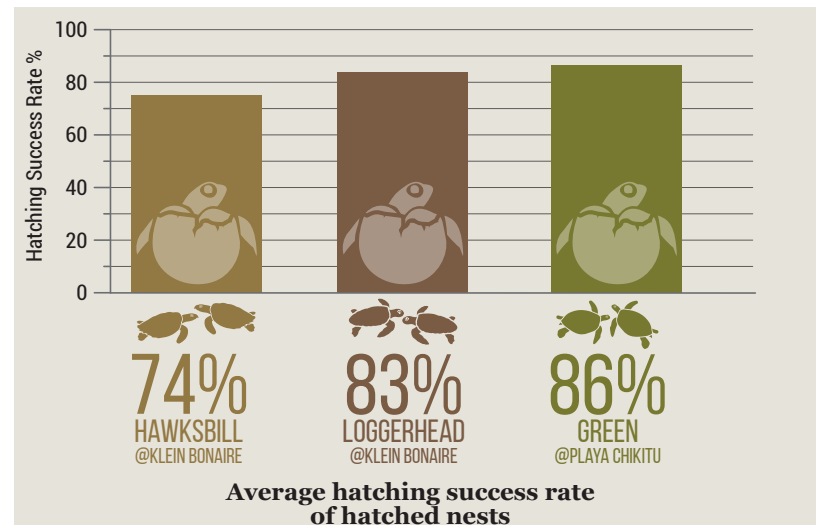
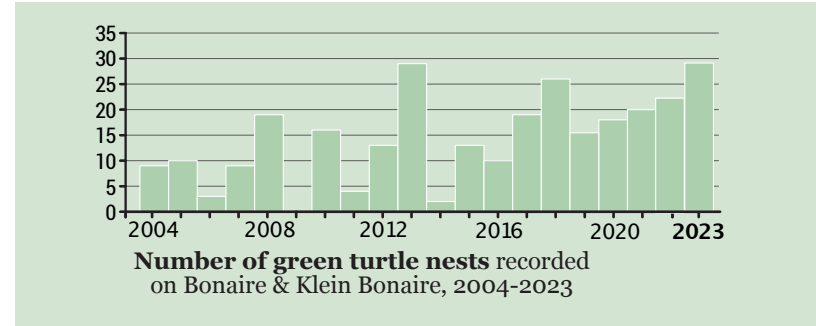
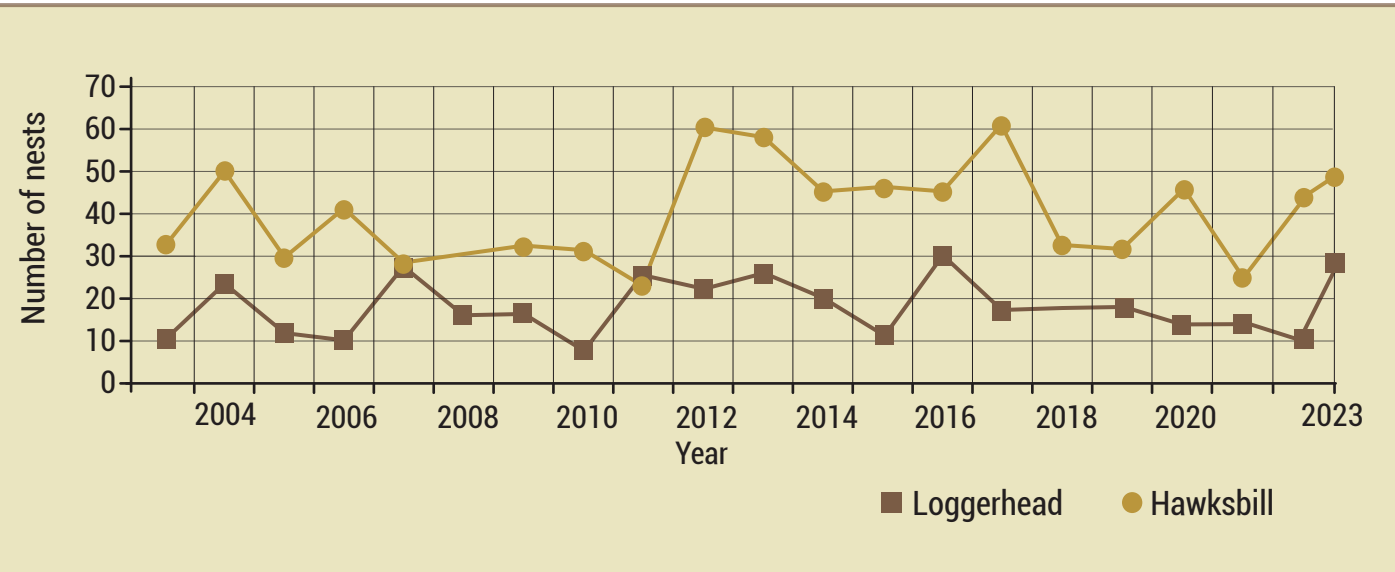
## A NESTING TURTLE

Female turtles return to the same nesting beach or area as where they once hatched. They use the earth's magnetic field to imprint their location at hatch dispersal and will use this compass as adults to find their way back to the same nesting area.

Nesting generally happens at night. The main reason for this is a lower risk of threats and a lower temperature. In 2023, we were lucky enough to run into a female hawksbill turtle laying her nest during the day!



**TRENDS** The long-term trend in nesting for both hawksbills and loggerheads remain stable and continue to suggest that the populations are fluctuating around an average of 18 nests for loggerheads and 40 nests for hawksbills on our index beach.



Bar plot of standardized searches in Klein Bonaire's No Name Beach resulted in 48 hawksbill turtle nests and 30 loggerhead turtle nests found between May and December 2023.







## FOLLOWING 'MATEO' AND 'GABRIELA'

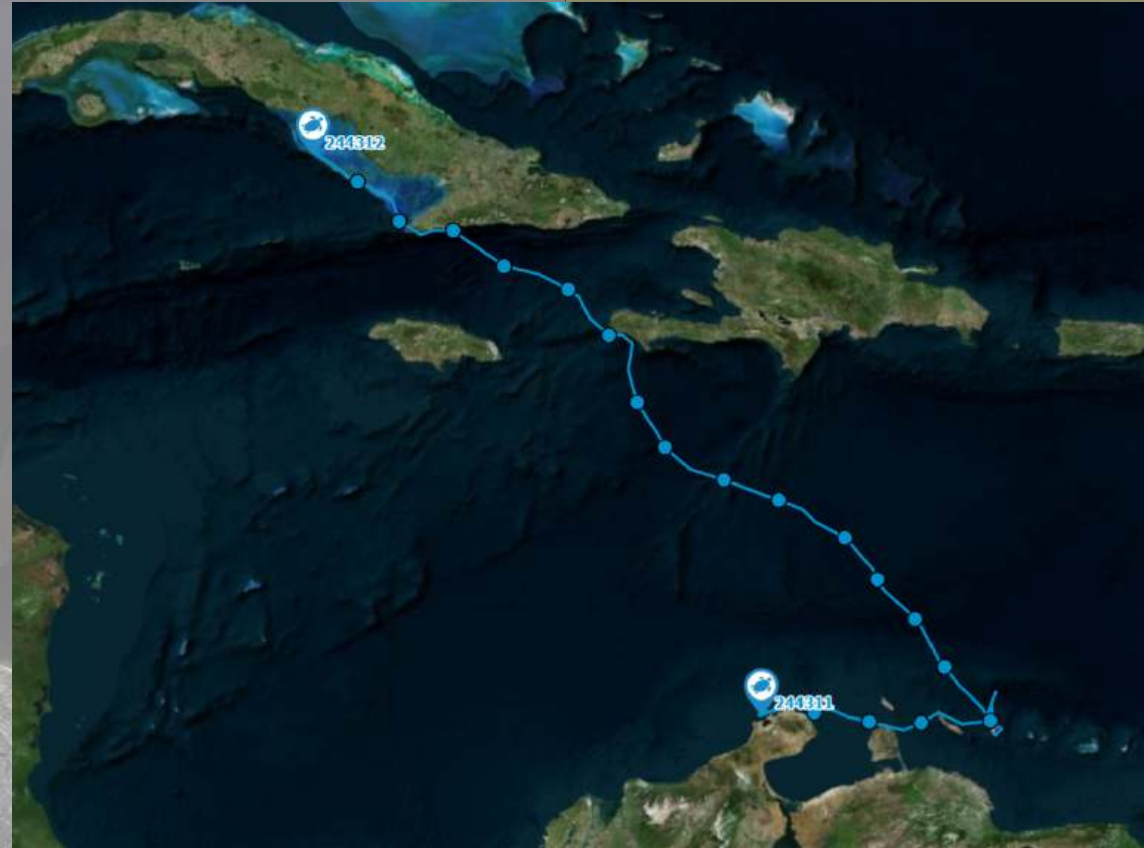
Sea turtles are migratory throughout their entire life. The information received from the satellite transmitters provides valuable insight into the turtles' foraging and breeding habits. Identifying sea turtles' migratory routes and distant foraging grounds also aids understanding the regional patterns of the species and provides valuable information in support of regional strategies for conservation.

During the last 20 years, STCB has placed satellite transmitters on 28 different sea turtles. In 2023, we received a significant donation, giving us the possibility to place two new satellite transmitters.

The first satellite transmitter was placed on July 21. This transmitter was placed on a green female turtle at Playa Chikitu. This turtle was named 'Mateo'. 'Mateo' stayed on Bonaire for 41 more days before leaving. She swam over 1650 kilometers and found her home in Jardines de la Reina in Cuba. We think that she laid a total of 5 nests in 2023. Jardines de la Reina is not a new foraging ground for the sea turtles of Bonaire. In 2012, we had another green female turtle, 'Anneke', who received a satellite transmitter and also found her foraging grounds in Cuba.

The second satellite transmitter was placed on a female loggerhead turtle on July 23. This turtle was named 'Gabriela'. After receiving the transmitter, she only stayed on Bonaire for a short week before returning home. We were excited for her to start her long journey to her foraging grounds. However, she found her home along the coast of the northern peninsula of Colombia within a few days. For some time we were expecting here to stay here for a few days to rest, before making a longer crossing. However, 'Gabriela' stayed in the same area along this coast and has found her home here.

Satellite transmitters are an important part of our research. Thanks to these transmitters we are able to understand where our nesting turtles spend most of their adult life and it enables us to learn more about their migration patterns. By learning where they spend most of their time, we can lobby for more legislation in these areas to give better protection for all of their life stages.



*Joshua Mateo Fortes-Jordan  
6/23/2000 - 8/13/2022*

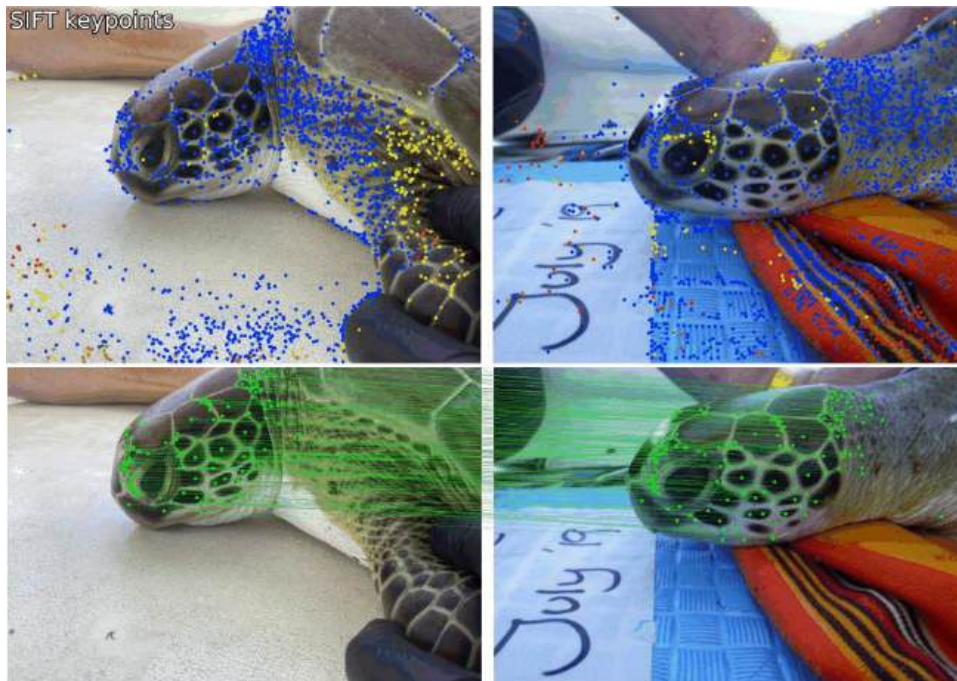
*These two satellite transmitters were placed in memory of Mateo, who was passionate about saving sea turtles after first swimming with them on Bonaire.*

## AI FOR TURTLES

We always try to develop better and more efficient ways to monitor sea turtle populations on Bonaire. One of the things we have been looking for is a way to identify individual turtles based on their facial scales. This is why we joined forces with FruitPunch AI to look at how we could use AI for the facial recognition of sea turtles.

The facial scales of sea turtles are unique, like a fingerprint, and can therefore be used to identify individual turtles. Over the last 20 years, we have tagged well over 4,000 turtles. During our tagging efforts, we do not only measure, weigh and tag the turtles, we also take photos of their head, flippers and carapace, creating a large photo database that was used for this challenge.

The FruitPunch AI team worked hard on this project for 10 weeks, resulting in a model that can identify sea turtles by scale recognition. We are currently looking for support to further develop this model and to integrate underwater photography. Hence, if you are familiar with AI models and interested in sharing your knowledge, please get in touch with us!

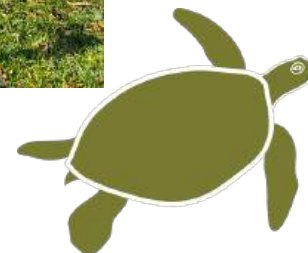


## STRAP

In 1992, the first Sea Turtle Recovery Action Plan (STRAP) was developed for the Netherlands Antilles and published in the Caribbean Environment Programme (CEP) Technical Report Series. In this document, the status of sea turtles that forage and nest on the islands of Bonaire, Curacao, Saba, St. Maarten and St. Eustatius was summarized, and threats as well as solutions to those threats were discussed.

Following a call from the Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network (WIDECAST), STCB together with WWF-NL applied for funding to update the STRAP. Funding was received in 2022 from the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality and ever since, STCB has been working with experts in the region to develop a new Action Plan.

2023 was focused on the first phase of this project: preparatory analysis & stakeholder consultation. A survey about the prevalence and magnitude of threats potentially affecting sea turtle populations in the Dutch Caribbean and the availability of data was conducted, and available data was analyzed. The next phase will be focused on the development of the actual STRAP followed by training sessions and capacity building on the different islands.



## LOCAL THREATS - THE SHARPNOSE PUFFERFISH

At the start of 2023, we had a large abundance of pufferfish larvae that settled on Bonaire. This resulted in a large bloom of sharpnose pufferfish around the reefs of Bonaire. These small fish are common in our waters and are harmless when seen on the reef.

However, when this bloom had too little resources and too much competition in April of 2023, it led to a population crash. This resulted in many of the small fish washing onto shore or floating at the surface, making it the perfect prey for juvenile green turtles - who are opportunistic feeders, meaning that they will eat any easy prey they can find.

Sharpnose pufferfish contain saxitoxins (STX), a neurotoxin that is also found in shellfish and the reason for bans on commercial and recreational shellfish harvesting. This neurotoxin paralyzes fish or sea turtles, resulting in secondary mortality.



## REHABILITATION

The first step after finding a sea turtle in trouble was rehabilitation. Sea turtles were held in big buckets and covered in wet towels to prevent dehydration.

All sea turtles were given fluids, glucose and activated carbon to support their recovery. Unfortunately, most of the injured sea turtles did not get strong enough to go back in the ocean and passed away days later.

Luckily, three 'rehab' turtles did recover and were released back into the water. After a practice swimming session in our special 'ocean rehab pool', we released them in Lac Bay.



## MANY REPORTS ON GREEN SEA TURTLES

At the end of April 2023, we started receiving calls about sea turtles that were barely moving or that had passed away. While the first casualty was a surprise, we soon realized that it was linked to the sharpnose pufferfish population crash.

After further inspection, we found that the sea turtles seemed to have neurological damage caused by the ingestion of sharpnose pufferfish. The associated (partial) paralysis led to several strandings.

21  
REPORTS

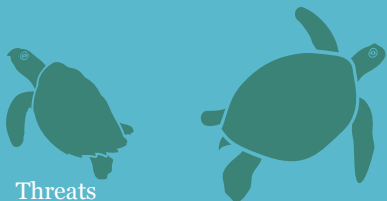
9  
DEATHS  
BY SHARPNOSE PUFFERFISH

5  
IN REHAB

3  
RELEASED

The sea turtles that did not make it, were necropsied. All necropsies confirmed that sharpnose pufferfish were the cause of death. Up to 27 sharpnose pufferfish were found in the stomach of the juvenile green sea turtles.

After about 2 weeks, we stopped receiving reports about turtles in trouble.



# 2023 STCB PARTNERS, SUPPORTERS AND VOLUNTEERS

## INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network (WIDECAST)  
World Wildlife Fund Netherlands (WWF-NL)

## REGIONAL/RESEARCH PARTNERS

CARMABI (Curaçao)  
Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance (DCNA)  
Groningen University  
Loggerhead Marinelifelife Center  
Nature Foundation St. Maarten  
Parke Nacional Arikok (Aruba)  
Saba Conservation Foundation  
Sea Turtle Conservation Curacao  
St. Eustatius National Parks Foundation  
Turtugaruba  
Wageningen University

## LOCAL PARTNERS

Bonberde  
Coastal Dynamics  
Echo Bonaire  
Flamingo Island Veterinary Center  
Klinika Veterinario Bonaire  
Mangrove Maniacs  
NGO Platform  
Openbaar Lichaam Bonaire (OLB)  
Reef Renewal  
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STINAPA Bonaire  
Tera Barra  
WILDCONSCIENCE B.V.

## LOCAL BUSINESS PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

These businesses provide ongoing support to STCB programs and activities through the donation of in-kind materials and/or services:

Administratiekantoor Brandaris  
Adventure Makers Bonaire  
Apoyo Communications & Education  
Beyond the Corals  
Blue Bottle  
Boat Yard Bonaire  
Bonaire Marine Center B.V.  
Bonaire East Coast Diving  
Carib Inn  
Cargill Salt Bonaire  
Dive Friends Bonaire  
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IGC Graphics  
Landsailing  
Plaza Marina Bonaire  
VIP Diving  
VSC Bonaire

## 2023 VOLUNTEERS

*Volunteers are at the heart of our organization. Without their support, we could not do the work that we do. A very big thank you goes to all of you - masha danki!!*

### BEACHKEEPER PROGRAM VOLUNTEERS

Aja & Scott, Alie & Peter, Andrea & family, Anneke van den Breemer, Bill & Bunny, Christel Damen, Danielle Klose, Duncan & Gwen, Jethro, Jill Dean, Jolanda vd Toorn, Lieke Rijk, Loek & Vera Maartens, Loes Hak, Lute & Nicole, Maggie & Frans, Mary Moss, Maxime & Annemieke, Meryam, Omie Tramper, Paulette Gadette, Rolf Rosloot, Ronaldo & Sandra, Sijbrand van 't Oever, Sophie Zeegers, Sue O'Brien, Suzan, Titia Jongepier.

### IN-WATER SURVEY/NETTING VOLUNTEERS

Alie Karman, Alena Radl, Anelica Verschragen, Anika Meij, Brendan Best, Britt Untersalmberger, Charlotte Croll, Charlotte Gregory, Christian Navarro Juan, Danny Peters, Dave Liefbroer, Dimply van den Elsen, Dina Drexire, Eileen McFarren, Elena Baker, Emma Post, Femke van den Brande, Freddy Klerks, Geert Nielen, Guy Kalron, Hanneke Vasse, Iris Deetman, Iris Wijkhuijzen, Jack Shannon, Jasmijn van Hoorn, Jennifer Fletcher, Jeroen Vermunt, Jethro, Jolanda van der Toorn, Joost Beenes, Kimberly Hooijberg, Lieke Rijk, Lisa Weszelits, Louis Petrich, Luc Hameleers, Lucas Floors, Lute Berends, Madeleine de Rooij, Marliou Renders, Marion Kluft, Martijn Whien, Mary Moss, McKenzie Hagenbuch, Mia Andrews, Monique Kooijman, Naemie Boone, Nancy Reuten, Nathalie Koot, Nicole Leffelaar, Peter Karman, Rob Hulsbergen, Robin Arens, Romuald van der Meij, Roos Ritzerfeld, Sanne Kerremans, Scott Gilchrist, Sean Price, Tamanae Vargas Salazar, Tanya Campbell, Tara May, Tessa van Gennip, Tessa Volbeda, Tineke Meij, Titia Jongepier, Yoeke van Hoorn.

### PRESENTATION VOLUNTEERS

Gwen Versteegh, Loek Maartens

47  
PRESENTATION  
HOURS

1728  
IN WATER SURVEYS  
HOURS

1436  
NEST MONITORING  
HOURS

1536  
NETTING  
HOURS

635  
CLEANUP  
HOURS

= 5,380  
TOTAL VOLUNTEER  
HOURS

STCB is a non-profit, non-governmental organization. We raise funds through conservation and research grants and contracts, merchandise sales and from individual and business donors.

## FLAGSHIP FUNDER 2008 – 2023

Since 2008, **WWF - Netherlands** has been the flagship funder for STCB's sea turtle conservation work on Bonaire.



## MAJOR FUNDERS

Major funders include the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature & Food Quality, Stichting DierenLot and Blue Jay bv.



## PLATINUM FUNDERS/DONORS [\$1000+]

Alex Bakhuizen & Anna Vasylieva  
Barbara Chu  
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Gijs, Mieke, Daan, Sam & Florine Botman  
Karel Hubers  
The Laughing Seahorse  
Oogwereld B.V.  
Rob Hulsbergen  
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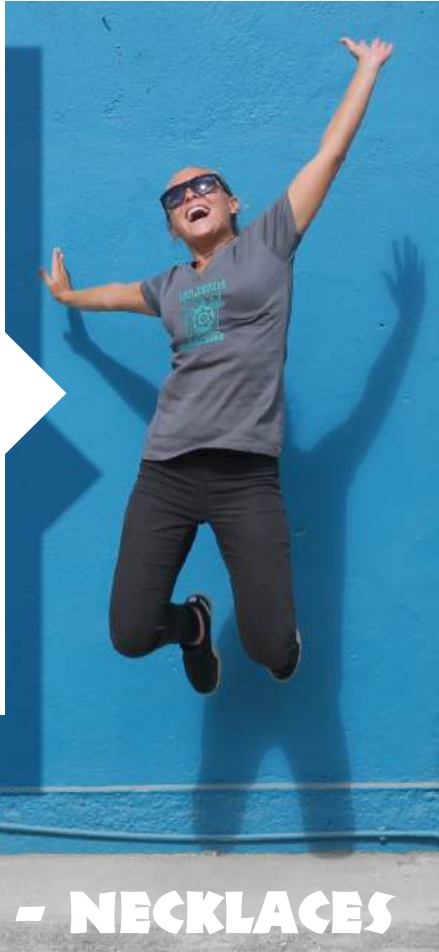


And anonymous donors. Thank you!

# DONATE

## STCB SHOP

Available only on Bonaire, STCB clothing is made from soft, earth-friendly, 100% recycled materials. STCB pendant necklaces are made from bone, beach seed & horn. They are the product of artisans in Costa Rica & Bonaire.



TEES - HATS - NECKLACES

You can buy original STCB T-shirts, research hats and jewelry at VIP Diving, Dive Friends Bonaire, Harbour Village Beach Club, Bonaire Landsailing, Scuba Do and at our office. Because these businesses donate their retail services, 100% of the profits from every STCB item you buy go directly to sea turtle conservation.

Our office is open on weekdays between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.  
We are located at Kaya Korona 53, Kralendijk, Bonaire,  
Caribbean Netherlands.

*You can help protect Bonaire's sea turtles by donating to STCB. We welcome – and depend on – the financial support of people like you.*

## YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Whether it's \$5, \$100, or \$5,000, whatever you give makes an important difference. 100% of funds received online will go directly to the protection of Bonaire's endangered sea turtles.

Your donation will help fund the following programs: nest monitoring, in-water surveys, clean-up events, turtle rescues, education and awareness programs, training, advocacy and satellite tracking.

## DUTCH CHARITABLE STATUS

As of January 1st 2015, the Dutch Tax Service (Belastingdienst) has granted to Sea Turtle Conservation Bonaire ANBI status. ANBI status also favors STCB's Donors in countries that grant tax concessions to foreign registered charities, as well as those based in the Netherlands. Donors who have made a donation to STCB may be able to deduct the amount from taxable income.

[More information regarding STCB's ANBI status here.](#)

## WAYS TO DONATE

### DONATE ONLINE THROUGH PAYPAL

Please be advised that donations to STCB are processed via PayPal by Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance (DCNA) of which STCB is a member.

### DONATE BY BANK TRANSFER

#### BANK TRANSFER ON BONAIRE

Maduro & Curiel's Bank Bonaire  
Account name: Sea Turtle  
Conservation Bonaire  
Account number: 101169209

#### BANK TRANSFER IN USD OUTSIDE BONAIRE

Beneficiary: Sea Turtle  
Conservation Bonaire  
Account number: 101169209  
Beneficiary Bank: Maduro &  
Curiel's Bank Bonaire  
Swift code: MCBKBQBN  
Correspondent Bank: Standard  
Chartered Bank  
Aba # 026002561  
Swift Code: SCBLUS33

#### BANK TRANSFER IN EUR FROM THE NETHERLANDS

Beneficiary: Sea Turtle  
Conservation Bonaire  
Account number: NL71 RABO  
0313 2425 26  
Beneficiary Bank: Rabobank

#### BANK TRANSFER FROM EUROPE

Beneficiary: Sea Turtle  
Conservation Bonaire  
Account number: 101.169.209  
Beneficiary Bank: Maduro &  
Curiel's Bank (Bonaire) N.V.  
Address: Kaya L.D. Gerharts #81  
City: Kralendijk  
Country: Bonaire, Caribbean  
Netherlands  
Telephone number: +599-715-  
5520  
Fax number: +599-717-7249  
Swift code: MCBKBQBN  
Correspondent Bank for Euro:  
Ing Belgium SA NV  
City: 24 Avenue Marnix, B-1000,  
Brussels  
Country: Belgium  
Swift Code: BBRUBEBB

Please mention your email when making a direct transfer as we'd like to send you a thank you note!

**MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

**BECOME A VOLUNTEER**

**JOIN A CLEAN-UP DIVE**

**ADOPT A NEST**

**JOIN A BEACH MONITORING  
PATROL**

**JOIN A BEACH CLEAN-UP**

**DONATE**

**JOIN A PRESENTATION**

**BECOME AN INTERN**

**ADOPT A HATCHLING**

**PURCHASE MERCHANDISE**

**DONATE EQUIPMENT**