

Green Turtle Nesting – Rupert’s Beach

On the 10th May 2023 the Marine and Fisheries Conservation Section (MFCS) and the St Helena National Trust had an exciting phone call from the St Helena Government’s Emergency Planning Service based at the Sea Rescue base, fortunately about a good kind of emergency - a potential green turtle nest at Rupert’s beach!

In the two months leading up to this day, we had received multiple calls about nesting attempts on Rupert’s Beach but as it is an industrial area with little to no beach and heavy, artificial light it unfortunately is not a suitable area for turtle nesting. For these reasons, the MFCS and various other Gov departments got together to create and build an artificial nest chamber. This would hopefully give the turtle eggs a better chance of growing to term without being flooded or predated on.

Back to the 10th May, myself (Cerys Joshua), Roberta Yon from the MCFS and Kenickie Andrews and Kirsten Augustus for the Trust, were able to rush to Rupert’s beach to assess the potential nest site. One of the nests (she’d attempted three!) wasn’t completed as the chamber looked as though it had started to cave in so to get the job done checking the other two, we broke up into teams. Kirsten and I dug one nest and Kenickie and Roberta dug the other. After about an hour or so of digging the eggs were found! They were in the nest closest to the entrance/exit of the beach!



The three different attempted nests.

There were 144 eggs in total that upon assessment were very fresh and covered in a mucus sack, so with excitement we excavated and relocated (very carefully) the eggs to the artificial chamber above the beach line.

Over the course of the next 60 days, Mrs Anel O’Bey (the caller from Emergency Planning) monitored the nest to see if there was any movement and reported back to both MFCS and The Trust on the progress. Usually green turtle eggs incubate in the nest and hatch around the 60 day mark but taking into consideration these eggs were laid during our winter period, where heavy rains and dropping temperatures could affect the likelihood of successful hatching, we thought it would take longer. After the 60 day period (19th July 2023), we decided to conduct a nest excavation to check the development of the eggs. Once assessed, the eggs were deemed still viable and were re-covered with sand to continue the incubation period.

The following weeks were a nail biting time with the nest being monitored closely for any progress.

On the 10th of August 2023, following another nest check, it was found that some hatchlings were fighting their way to the surface. On further inspection, the nest revealed 11 hatchlings! With more

eggs below beginning to hatch. The hatchlings were removed from the artificial nest chamber and secured safely whilst the remaining eggs were re-covered to ensure that they were protected from the elements and predation and to continue the hatching process.

Later that evening, the two teams made the long travel to Sandy Bay beach to release the 11 hatchlings into the ocean. It was decided to release the hatchlings at Sandy Bay beach and not Rupert's beach because of it being a completely natural habitat/environment for turtle nesting and with Rupert's beach being industrialised, the presence of artificial lighting would have impaired the natural biology of a newly hatched turtle. Lowering their chances of making it to the ocean.

At Sandy Bay beach the turtles were given an area of beach to scurry to the ocean, this allowed their natural process of imprinting onto the general area; meaning the hatchlings can remember St Helena from smell and magnetic fields which will allow them to return in the distant future to continue the life cycle. We can't wait to welcome them back!



The artificial nest and excavation of eggs.