

## Green turtle nesting at Gris Gris beach in Mauritius

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The oceanic islands of Mauritius and its outer islands are ideal nesting sites for green sea turtles. In the 1800s, the Dutch reported great numbers of turtle nesting in Mauritius, but due to exploitation by man and the loss of favourable habitats for nesting, very few turtles exist in the waters around Mauritius today. There may have been occasional nesting of turtles in the past few years, but these events have not been documented. Nesting of the green sea turtle *Chelonia mydas* was first reported in 1977 (Thompson, 1981) at La Cambuse, in southeast Mauritius. Legal protection offered to marine turtles dates back to the enforcement of the Fisheries Act of 1980 and more recently to the Fisheries & Marine Resource Act of 1998.

After 31 years, successful egg-laying and hatching of a green sea turtle was observed in Mauritius at Gris Gris, a sublime and beautiful beach in the south of the country (Figure 1). A nesting turtle was observed

laying eggs on the beach late at night on 31 October 2007 by a villager who informed the National Coast guard, the Fisheries Protection Service (FPS) and the Albion Fisheries Research Centre (AFRC) which is the technical arm of the Ministry of Agro-Industry and Fisheries. Subsequently, the nesting site was protected and on 10 January 2008, 4 hatchlings were collected from the site. The movement of most of the hatchlings (79) went unnoticed due to heavy rains, and out of the four hatchlings, 3 were released at sea and one is being reared at the Albion Fisheries Research Centre. On 25<sup>th</sup> January 2008, the nest was excavated; the clutch had 113 eggs of which 83 hatched egg shells, 21 unhatched eggs and 10 decayed eggs were noted.

This event is exceptional for Mauritius whose coastline is bearing the brunt of rapid development and brings hope that green sea turtles will visit the calm, pristine beaches in future for nesting.

### Literature cited

Thompson, R.K. 1981. Nesting of the green sea turtle, *Chelonia mydas* (Linnaeus) 1758, in Mauritius. *Revue Agricole et Sucriere de l'Ile Maurice* 60:125-130.



**Figure 1:** Gris Gris beach in Mauritius