

# Status of leatherback turtles in United Kingdom – British Indian Ocean Territory (B.I.O.T.)

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## 1. The legal protection status for leatherback turtles

### 1.1. Overview

All marine turtles are protected by law in BIOT. Certain fisheries regulations are particularly pertinent to leatherback turtles.

### 1.2. Legislation protecting leatherback turtles

*Legislation pertinent to marine turtles in general:*

The protection and preservation of Wild Life Ordinance 1970 (as amended) empowers the Commissioner to enact legislation to protect wildlife (including turtles), prohibit the purchase, sale or export of wildlife, and prohibit the introduction of wildlife. It also permits the seizure in certain circumstances, of any vessel which brought a suspected offender into the Territory and, if any fine imposed is not paid, the eventual forfeiture of that vessel.

The Wildlife Protection regulations of 1984 makes it an offence to ‘intentionally kill or attempt to kill or injure, or to take or be in possession of ‘and ‘intentionally to destroy, damage or take any birds nest while the nest is in use or being built, or any birds egg or turtles eggs’. The Wild Life Protection (Amendment) Regulations 2000 (2003) extends this list to include possession of a ‘dead animal or any part of an animal or of a dead animal.

Green Turtles Protection regulations 1968 states that ‘no person shall harpoon, kill, destroy or take possession of any turtle for any reason whatsoever (Similar legislation was not passed for Hawksbill turtles at this time because hawksbill turtle flesh was not being hunted for its meat; however all turtles are protected under other legislation). The Prohibited Imports and Export Order, 1984 prohibits the exportation of ‘wild animals, whether alive or dead, (includes turtle eggs)

The Trade in Endangered Species (Control) Ordinance 2001 provides for the application of CITES, appointing the Administrator as the Management Authority and requiring that advice be taken from a scientific authority ‘... a person or authority as the Commissioner may from time to time appoint. The Joint Nature Conservation Committee is appointed as the Scientific Authority under Section 5 of this Ordinance.

(The introduction of species does not appear to be expressly prohibited other than in Strict Nature Reserves)

*Legislation relevant to leatherbacks:*

The use of drift nets is prohibited in BIOT waters by conditions attached to fishing licences and the Fisheries Conservation and Management Ordinance 1998 and this Ordinance makes it an offence to contravene licence conditions.

### Note:

Driftnets are known to impact leatherbacks, and it is likely that leatherbacks forage in the territorial waters of BIOT.

### 1.3. Management agencies responsible for marine turtle conservation

Operational level	Name and type of agency
<b>National level</b>	UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office, BIOT Administration
<b>State level</b>	
<b>Local level</b>	Department of Environment, Diego Garcia

## 2. Nesting populations

### 2.1. Overview

#### Summary

There have been no confirmed reports of leatherback nesting in the Chagos Islands, British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) (Mortimer & Day, 1999). But, according to Marcel Moulinie who managed cobra collection in the Chagos in the 1960s and 1970s (pers. comm. to J.A. Mortimer), a single leatherback once nested at Peros Banhos atoll during the early 1970s.

The following turtle surveys have been conducted in BIOT territory during the past three decades:

- Frazier (1977) made a brief visit to several of the islands in 1970 and interviewed a number of local inhabitants. None reported leatherback nesting.
- Dutton (1980) surveyed several of the islands of Peros Banhos atoll in late 1978/early 1979, and found no evidence of leatherback nesting.
- Mortimer surveyed most of the islands of BIOT during a six week period in 1996 and found no evidence of leatherback nesting anywhere (Mortimer & Day, 1999).
- Mortimer surveyed the entire coastline of Diego Garcia atoll in 1999 and found no evidence of leatherback nesting (Mortimer, 2000).

## 2. Foraging populations

### 3.1. Details of any leatherback turtle foraging area census or tagging results

No information available

### 3.2. Seasonality of leatherback turtles in coastal and offshore waters

No information available

### 3.3. Approximate size range of leatherback turtles

No information available

### 3.4. Information on the diet of leatherback turtles

No information available

### 3.5. Other biological studies conducted on leatherback turtles in foraging areas

No information available

### 3.6. Threats to foraging populations of leatherback turtles

No information available, however, commercial fishing activities, especially long lines & netting activities are a potential threat to leatherbacks in the territory.

### 3.7. Fisheries bycatch of leatherback turtles and the fisheries involved

No information available

### 3.8. Other activities being undertaken to improve conservation of leatherback turtles

No information available

## 3. Concluding Remarks

leatherbacks can be expected to forage regularly in the territorial waters of BIOT, but no information is available. Collaboration with the fisheries authorities is needed to gather data on this matter and determine what follow up conservation efforts may be called for.

## 5. References

- Dutton RA (1980) The herpetology of the Chagos Archipelago. *British Journal of Herpetology* **6**, 133-134.
- Frazier J (1977) Marine Turtles in the Western Indian Ocean: British Indian Ocean Territories, Comores. *Oryx* **13**, 162-175.
- Mortimer JA (2000) 'Diego Garcia Marine Turtle Conservation Assessment.' Fauna & Flora International.
- Mortimer JA (1999) Sea turtle populations and habitats in the Chagos Archipelago. In 'Ecology of the Chagos Archipelago'. (Ed. CRC Sheppard) pp. 159-176)