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Critically Endangered Hawksbill Sea Turtle Killed by Boat Near Water Island

A hawksbill sea turtle was fatally struck by a boat near Honeymoon Beach, Water Island, prompting renewed concerns about threats to sea turtles in the USVI. STAR recorded 36 sea turtle strandings in 2024, with boat strikes accounting for nearly a quarter.

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Rescue team member retrieves a critically endangered hawksbill sea turtle fatally struck by a boat near Honeymoon Beach, Water Island. By. STAR

A critically endangered hawksbill sea turtle was fatally struck by a boat near Honeymoon Beach, Water Island, highlighting ongoing threats to sea turtles in the region, according to the Sea Turtle Assistance and Rescue (STAR) team.

The STAR team responded to reports of the stranded turtle on February 25 and confirmed that the adult female had sustained fatal injuries consistent with a boat strike.

Hawksbill sea turtles, classified as Critically Endangered, face significant risks due to human activities, making conservation efforts in the U.S. Virgin Islands crucial, the STAR team said. The USVI is home to three nesting sea turtle species—hawksbills, leatherbacks, and greens—which rely on the territory's coastal waters and beaches for foraging and nesting year-round.

Boat strikes pose one of the most serious dangers to sea turtles in the Virgin Islands. In 2024 alone, STAR recorded 36 sea turtle strandings, with eight of those directly caused by boats. Sea turtles spend considerable time at the surface for breathing, mating, and searching for nesting sites, making them particularly vulnerable to vessel traffic. When boats operate at high speeds, turtles often cannot react quickly enough to dive to safety, leading to injuries or fatalities.

To reduce the risk of future incidents, STAR is urging all boaters to follow safe boating practices. Operators should maintain a 5 mph speed in no-wake zones, travel at slow speeds (under 15 mph) in nearshore waters, and stay alert for turtles surfacing. These precautions are essential to protecting sea turtles and minimizing harm to their populations in the USVI's coastal waters.

STAR, a nonprofit network of government agencies, NGOs, veterinarians, local organizations, and volunteers, is dedicated to rescuing and protecting sea turtles across the three Virgin Islands. The team responds to reports of stranded, injured, trapped, or dead sea turtles, ensuring that conservation efforts continue throughout the territory.

Anyone who encounters a stranded or injured sea turtle is encouraged to call STAR at 340-690-0474. Callers should be ready to provide detailed information, including the location of the stranding, the condition of the turtle (alive or dead), and any visible injuries.