

The Virgin Islands Consortium

NPS Patrolling Buck Island While Turtles Nest

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ST. CROIX -- The National Park Service is celebrating its twenty-ninth year of research on the sea turtles nesting at the Buck Island Reef National Monument. N.P.S, along with its partner agencies (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of Planning and Natural Resources Division of Fish and Wildlife, VICZM, St. Croix East End Marine Park, and The Nature Conservancy) are informing the community about sea turtles and the special consideration given to them while they nest in the territory.

The nesting season for Virgin Island sea turtles (leatherback, green, loggerhead, and hawksbill) begins in March and continues through December of each year, according to NPS. There are several key nesting areas on St. Croix, including Buck Island Reef, Sandy Point and St. Croix's East End Beaches. Also included are Southgate, Coakley

Bay, and Half Penny Beach on the south shore.

Nearly all beaches on St. Croix are utilized by nesting sea turtles, NPS said.

On July 21, NPS began nightly patrols to protect nesting turtles at the beaches on Buck Island Reef, and has initiated long-term research on these endangered sea turtles. The patrolling runs through October 31.

NPS also reminded the public that Buck Island beaches are closed to visitors after sunset until sunrise. All boats doing overnights at West Beach Anchorage will have to confirm overnight permit with NPS Law Enforcement prior to stay, according to the release. Contact 340-773-1460 or 340-277-6794 for more information.

If you encounter turtles nesting or hatchlings on any St. Croix beach, NPS said it is important to remember the following:

1. **They are protected** - all sea turtles are protected throughout the U.S. Virgin Islands under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. Beach users need to closely follow all regulations, especially pertaining to beach fires and dogs. The Act also bans the use of tents and the practice of digging in dry sand. Violations are subject to prosecution under civil and criminal laws with heavy penalties.
2. **Drive slow** - boat operators should drive cautiously; sea turtles rise slowly to the surface to breathe, and it takes them several seconds to dive to safety when they hear an approaching motor boat.
3. **Shield lights** - bright lights along beaches will disorient nesting adult sea turtles and hatchlings. Coastal property owners are encouraged to modify/shield or discontinue use of outdoor lights.
4. **Keep your distance** – do not interfere with nesting or hatchling sea turtles; observe from a distance. Do not use flashlights or flash photography.
5. **How to help** - if you find an adult nest or hatchling sea turtle in distress please contact one of the following parties:

Buck Island Reef National Monument NPS Resource Management 24-hr contact at (340) 277-6794

NPS Headquarters Christiansted: (340) 773-1460 (8:30 am to 4:30 pm).

Sea Turtle Assistance and Rescue Network (STAR) 24-hr hotline: 340-690-0474 At Sandy Point

National Wildlife Refuge USFWS: (340) 773-4554 or (340) 690-9451.

All other locations should contact D.P.N.R. Enforcement: 340-244-9066 VI DPNR Division of Fish & Wildlife: 340-773-1082.