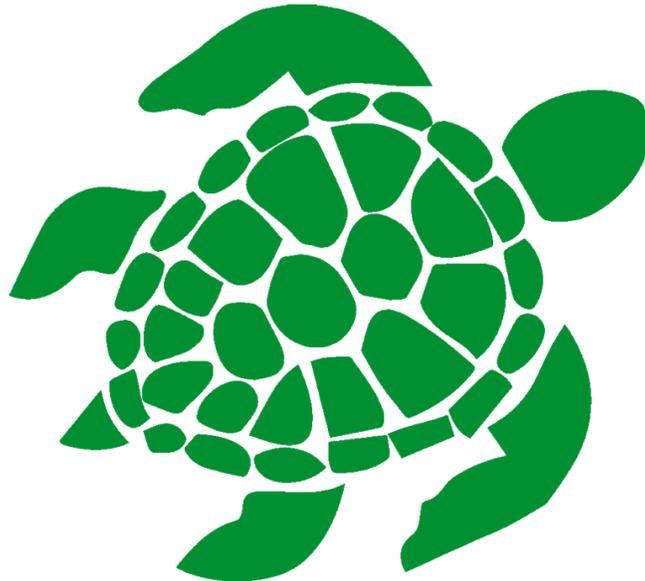


# Bonaccan Pride



## Turtle Protection Project

2019

GREEN  
ISLAND  
CHALLENGE



GUANAJA

WILD  
& FREE



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## **Organization**

The Green Island Challenge is a grassroots community organization in action since 2018.

## **Title**

Bonaccan Pride: Sea Turtle Nest Defense Project

## **Summary**

Guanaja, locally known as Bonacca, is one of three Bay Islands of Honduras. Unlike its sister islands (Roatan and Utila) which have been overwhelmed by tourism, the vast majority of Guanaja is undeveloped. This has allowed sea turtles to continue nesting and endemic parrots to flourish. Unfortunately, the lack of tourism means there is also a lack of income for islanders-- often forcing them to depend on poaching to make ends meet.

Though already declared a Marine Protected Area, Guanaja has no active conservation efforts to protect marine turtles at the local government level. A group of concerned community members on Guanaja have organized themselves into the Green Island Challenge to step up and fill this need. For the last two years, the Green Island Challenge has organized nightly patrols during sea turtle nesting season.

Importantly, the most common species nesting in Guanaja are Hawksbills (90% of all nesting turtles), the second most critically endangered sea turtle in the Atlantic. We understand that proactive monitoring of sea turtle nests is key to restoring this endangered species to healthy population levels.

This project has three general goals: to guarantee the successful hatching of all documented nests, provide an alternative livelihood for poachers and show how protecting turtles is more profitable than poaching, and generate a general consensus on the island of Guanaja regarding need to protect sea turtles. To date, we have successfully trained and hired former poachers to protect turtles and their nests and have launched an island-wide environmental education program.

## **Background and Relevance**

Sea turtles are emblematic to many cultures and it is no different on the island of Guanaja, Honduras. Hawksbills are the most commonly found sea turtle on the island which is notable given the critically endangered status of this species (Red List, IUCN, 2019). According to IUCN, this species has seen a 80-90% decline of its population within the last three generations. Their numbers continue to decrease due to tourism, climate change effects both on their habitat and reproductive cycles, poaching, and by-catch. When the Green Island Challenge began to patrol the beaches we did not know Guanaja is a nesting site for Hawksbills. Two years later, we are now nurturing island-wide pride to protect this symbol of Guanaja.

In 2018, the first night patrols were organized by the community with the support of generous individuals who lent their boats and provided fuel. In 2019, we extended our patrol months, increased former poachers' participation and added a stipend, again, thanks to the support of individuals for boats, fuel and volunteers.

All participants are trained and required to pass a test regarding the proper handling, tagging, identification and measurements/data to record. Groups of six (one former poacher, on boat captain and four student volunteers) patrol both the East End and West End beaches by foot, every night from June-November. We keep records on turtles and their nests, and share our data on citizen science platforms. The project also includes the participation of local government, the Navy, and marine biology researchers.

Another essential part of this project is our integrated environmental education program for which we are seeking a stipend in 2020. A month long curriculum is implemented to all juniors and seniors after which they volunteer patrolling the beaches for a month. We examine the endangered status of sea turtles, the set of challenges presented by climate change, and the need to protect ecosystems in order to ensure a future for Guanaja. Our education program, like our field work, is continuously growing. This year we plan to reach beyond the classroom and organize environmental workshops for local patronatos, congregations and fishery associations.

Given that this project started in 2018, we have an established presence both online and in the field. Through social media we are able to communicate our plans and generate community support. We believe this is key in dissuading poachers from targeting nests, but we also know that nesting females are

still targets at sea. Unfortunately, nesting season coincides with open lobster season in Guanaja. This year, two Hawksbill turtle shells were found in July and we received alerts that several people had acquired turtle meat in August. Without the capacity to run day-time water patrols, poaching will be difficult to stop. Day-time water patrols are our top priority for next year's turtle nest defense project.

This project combines alternative livelihoods with citizen science and community development. By employing former poachers we show that protecting is profitable both now and in the long term. Through citizen science platform like TurtApp, we generate a sense of pride and regional collaboration within the caribbean as well as data for scientists around the world. Via job creation, internships for the youth, and the diverse educational programming, we engage islanders of all ages to get involved proactively in the protection of species that also call Guanaja their home.

2020 will mark the third year our grassroots group has organized the Turtle Nest Defense Project. Every year we become better organized and have records documenting the positive results of our efforts. Our first year, 2018, we protected 26 nests, of which two were looted. This year, 2019, none of the 18 nests recorded were looted and we witnessed the hatching and entry to sea of nearly 3,000 hatchlings.

### **Detailed Objectives**

This project has five main objectives:

- Guarantee the successful hatching of all documented nests,
- Provide an alternative livelihood for poachers and show how protecting turtles is more profitable than poaching
- Generate island-wide environmental consciousness and participation in conservation initiatives regarding need to protect sea turtles.
- Generate data to better tailor conservation efforts and support official designation of the nesting sites as a Key Biodiversity Areas, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a national park.
- Set the tone on the island that conservation is a serious matter and will be enforced.

To date, we have successfully trained and hired four former poachers to protect turtles and their nests and have launched an island-wide environmental education program.

Budget: Marine Turtle Nest Recovery Project 2020						
<b>Timeline: June - October 2020</b>						
Lempira : Dollar :: L24 : \$1						
<b>Monitoring and Protection of Nests</b>						<b>Distribution of Costs</b>
<b>Beach Patrol Months</b>	<b>Pay Per Day (Lempiras)</b>	<b>Days a Month</b>	<b>No. of People</b>	<b>Lempiras</b>	<b>USD</b>	
June	L300.00	30	4	L36,000.00	\$1,500.00	
July	L300.00	31	4	L37,200.00	\$1,550.00	
August	L300.00	31	4	L37,200.00	\$1,550.00	
September	L300.00	30	4	L36,000.00	\$1,500.00	
October	L300.00	31	4	L37,200.00	\$1,550.00	
Snacks, Water \$50/month x 5 months				L8,400.00	\$350.00	
<b>Subtotal</b>				<b>L192,000.00</b>	<b>\$8,000.00</b>	Needed
<b>Environmental Education Program</b>						
100 T-shirts	For volunteers, raising awareness, generating funds			L19,200.00	\$800.00	
Carnaval Float Materials	Colors, paper, scissors, paint, etc.			L7,200.00	\$300.00	
10 Mask and Snorkel Sets	To aid in environmental education			L8,400.00	\$350.00	
Visual materials	Signs, posters, brochures to mark turtle patrol areas and foster awareness			L13,200.00	\$550.00	Secured Via Local Donations
2nd Teacher	\$500 / month, 6 months			L72,000.00	\$3,000.00	Partially secured

<b>Subtotal</b>				<b>L120,000.00</b>	<b>\$5,000.00</b>	
<b>Field Equipment</b>						
Oil for boat	4 changes, 6 quarts per month (1 q oil = 200 lps)			L2,400.00	\$100.00	Secured via Donations from local gas stations
Fuel	25 gallons per week (1 gallon = 100 lps)			L50,000.00	\$2,100.00	
2 Portable VHF communicator radios	(200 USD/ unit)			L9,600.00	\$400.00	Secured via Local Donations/ Fundraising
2 Gps				L14,400.00	\$600.00	
10 red light headlamps				L7,200.00	\$300.00	
<b>Subtotal</b>				<b>L83,600.00</b>	<b>\$3,500.00</b>	
<b>Budget Total</b>				<b>L395,600.00</b>	<b>\$16,500.00</b>	

### Relation to Previous Work

The Sea Turtle Nest Defense Project is beginning its third year. Everyone participating has been involved before stipends were involved and are committed to the work as well as making it grow. The Green Island Challenge's field work is co-lead by two honduran forestry engineers Anaur Romero and Dany Hernandez (an ally in local government and part of the Environmental Unit of the Municipality UMA). Now living in Guanaja, they have both worked long-term in marine-coastal ecosystem conservation in the Bay Islands. This particular project is mentored by both Dr. Stephen Dunbar, a marine biologist based in California's University specializing in turtle monitoring in Honduras and by Susan Hendrickson, a now retired marine specialist all around (archeology, biology, paleontology). They maintain oversight on our projects via monthly project reports, budget summaries, and frequent meetings.





