

# Sandy Point

## National Wildlife Refuge



photo: Steve Simonsen



photo: Kelly Stewart



photo: USFWS



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### Photos (top to bottom):

- Sandy Point NWR*
- Leatherback hatchling*
- Banded male yellow warbler*
- Least tern chicks*

### Refuge Facts:

- Acres: 383.
- Established: 1984.
- Location: The refuge and the refuge office are located at the southwest end of St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI), just south of Frederiksted.
- Administration: Caribbean Islands National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Complex. The headquarters of the complex is located in Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico. Sandy Point NWR was the first refuge in the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Refuge System established for the purpose of protecting endangered sea turtles.

### Natural History

- The refuge provides critical nesting habitat for three species of federally threatened and endangered sea turtle: the leatherback, hawksbill, and green sea turtle.
- The leatherback sea turtle recovery project began monitoring and management activities at Sandy Point in 1977. The Project has since developed into one of the most comprehensive, long-term sea turtle research and recovery efforts in the world.
- The refuge has the longest continuous beach in the USVI. The beach is highly dynamic with sand consistently eroding and re-depositing. The beach is never the same place twice.

- Three-quarters of the largest salt pond in the USVI, the West End Salt Pond, is located on the refuge. The pond is mangrove fringed and heavily used by water-dependent birds.
- A pre-historic Aklis site is found within the refuge boundaries dating back to 400 AD.
- One of only six known populations of the endangered Vahl's Boxwood tree is protected in the refuge.
- Beach and salt pond habitats provide nesting habitat to significant numbers of Least terns, Wilson's plovers and Black-necked Stilts.

### Refuge Objectives

- Conserve, enhance, restore and protect native wildlife populations and habitat.
- Conserve and protect cultural resources.
- Provide environmental education and interpretive opportunities.
- Support the Service's commitment to implement and carry out sea turtle recovery plans.

### Management Tools

- Wildlife monitoring and surveys.
- Scientific research.
- Invasive species control.
- Habitat restoration and reforestation.
- Law enforcement.

### Public Use Opportunities

- Environmental education.
- Wildlife observation.
- Nature photography.
- Hiking.
- Biking.

### Questions and Answers

*Is the refuge open to the public?*

Sandy Point NWR closes seasonally during April, May, June, July, and August to protect the nests and hatchlings of the endangered leatherback sea turtle. The refuge is open the remainder of the year on Saturdays and Sundays from 10 am to 4 pm.

*Would there be a possibility to see sea turtles on the refuge?*

The Turtle Watch Education Program runs from April through July and is open to school classes, youth groups, and community organizations. You will be escorted on a night visit to the refuge beach to see female leatherback sea turtles digging their nests and laying eggs. Later in the season, program participants watch hatchlings emerge from their nests and crawl to the sea. You can schedule a Turtle Watch for a group of 15 to 30 participants by calling 340/690 9452.

*Is the refuge a good place for bird watching?*

Yes, over 100 bird species have been recorded at the refuge! Inland from the sandy beaches, thorny scrub plant communities and littoral woodlands dominate, providing valuable habitat for an assortment of land birds. Several mangrove-fringed salt ponds provide feeding, roosting, and nesting habitat to a variety of shorebird species.

*Are there any other national wildlife refuges near Sandy Point NWR?*

Green Cay NWR is a small island off the northeast coast of St. Croix. Because the refuge contains one of the last significant populations of the critically endangered St. Croix Ground Lizard, it is closed to the public.