

The results so far are the phasing out of turtle egg exploitation, a co-funded turtle monitoring station has been established (funds from Turtle Foundation, Germany, KEHATI, the German Embassy, and WWF), and collaboration and integration among stakeholders has slowly been formed. The committee development is progressing, but slowly.

KEHATI facilitated a volunteer program for six months in 2001. From the data collected during May-October, during which 230 females were tagged and 18,192 eggs from 259 nests have been excluded from exploitation and naturally hatched. On average, there were 85 eggs per nest. The average size of nesting females was 89-90 cm SCL and 95-96 cm CCL. Hatching success rates from 46 *in situ* nests was 72.1% and from 89 hatchery nests was 85.5%. Incubation periods averaged 49 days. KEHATI has developed a Turtle Monitoring Station, and appointed a station manager for six months to initiate the management of the station, build a database of turtle records, and develop information displays. It is expected that in the future this station can become an information centre, producing regular information (newsletter) and supporting the establishment of trust fund for turtle conservation in Berau. There has also been a conservation campaign in the form of translation and distribution of films on case studies on community turtle conservation, radio programs, for District and Village Information Centres.

At the moment, there are thoughts to re-open the rearing program among several households. The objectives are to use this as a educational and awareness tool, to increase the community engagement to the turtle conservation, and to increase social pressures towards reducing egg poaching. This idea still needs to be discussed with other stakeholders. To implement this idea, support from other stakeholders and improvement of the rearing techniques will be required.

### **Conservation Challenges**

Direct economic benefits gained by local egg concession holders, local government, and a few households involved in the rearing program, meant that an abrupt cessation of eggs exploitation was strongly opposed. Moreover, no data, demand for instant impact of intervention, and weak law enforcement were used to argue for continuing egg exploitation. Currently, additional problems are faced due to an increase in egg poaching and turtle hunting and demand from the local community for a right to turtle management (income from rearing program).

It is a challenge when long-life-span species depend on a yearly basis decisions, and when conservation efforts take a long time (or even unsuccessful) in showing results that can benefit the local stakeholders. There is an urgent need to find an effective, affordable patrolling mechanism and monitoring mechanism, creating a sustainable financing mechanism, and an effective campaign to promote natural hatching, and alternative activities for local community with short-term tangible results.

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## **PRESENT STATUS OF MARINE TURTLES IN SRI LANKA \***

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**Thushan Kapurusinghe**

*Turtle Conservation Project - Sri Lanka, 73, Hambantota Road, Tangalle, Sri Lanka*

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Sri Lanka provides the aquatic and terrestrial habitats for the five species of sea turtles: the green (*Chelonia mydas*), Olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*), loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*), leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*) and hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*). Despite protection by government legislation since 1972, and amendments made in 1993, their future is in jeopardy, with many turtle populations declining to the point where they are no longer significant resources either materially or culturally. This is due mainly to the indiscriminate exploitation largely for their eggs and meat (Hewavisenthi, 1990). In addition, turtle nesting beaches are being disturbed by tourist industry development and feeding habitats, such as coral reefs and other coastal vegetation including mangrove habitats, are being destroyed by pollution and unsustainable harvesting. Many turtles are accidentally caught and drowned in fishing gear each year (Kapurusinghe, M.M. Saman, 2001).

The South and Southwest coastline of Sri Lanka comprises the largest marine turtle rookeries (Amarasooriya, 2000). One of the most widespread forms of marine turtle exploitation in Sri Lanka is the illegal poaching of turtle eggs for human consumption or for sale to unscientifically managed 'tourist attractions' turtle hatcheries (Richardson, 1995). Law enforcement and the implementation of community-based turtle conservation projects at important nesting beaches are not at satisfactory levels in Sri Lanka. Research work is adequate to understand the dynamics of local turtle populations. To increase the public awareness in turtle conservation, the TCP conducts various programmes for coastal communities each year.