



Sea Turtles



Nearby is Sri Lanka's pioneering sea turtle conservation project operated by local people with the help of international volunteers.



The beach is a prime turtle nesting site and strictly controlled to prevent disturbance by visitors.

You can view the turtles coming ashore to lay their eggs at night. Visits are usually after 8pm.

The project has been underway since 1988. The main aim of the project is to monitor local sea turtle activity and conserve the local nesting sites by making the public more aware of how endangered these creatures are and just how important it is to help protect them.



One of the most important activities of the project is its hatchery. Within the sanctuary of the project, collected and rescued eggs can hatch safely away from predators before being released into the sea. In addition, a certain number from each hatching are kept back for a short period for 'headstarting' before release.

The hatchery program is designed to maximise the number of hatchlings reaching the sea and surviving through the critical stages of their early life.

Only a few hatchlings from each batch will ever make it to adulthood. Therefore every nest-ground, every egg, every hatchling and every turtle is crucial to the survival of the species. Unfortunately, sea turtles face many dangers.

The project's work relies on fundraising and grants. Every year, the project helps clear and maintain the local beach, protecting vital nesting-grounds (particularly important after the devastation of the Tsunami) and releases thousands of



hatchlings. When you consider how long the project has been going, you can begin to understand the impact the project has.

The project is proud to host international volunteers who assist with the operation of the project and/or undertake local community development projects. In return, volunteers gain valuable experience participating in local projects - learning about turtles, turtle conservation, the local community, Sri Lanka.

Placements with the project commence from one week to twelve week duration.

Volunteering is a very hands-on experience involving beach conservation work, maintenance of the turtle hatchery, turtle feeding (and cleaning) and even taking tours round the project for locals and tourists.

Green Turtle



The Green Turtle is the most commonly found turtle in Sri Lanka. They are also found in the Indian, Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. Their English name refers to the colour of the fat found under their shells, which unfortunately is used to make turtle soup. Luckily this practice is less common today. Young Green Turtles are mainly carnivores. Adults however are herbivores, feeding only on marine vegetation with the help of their finely serrated jaws.

They grow to a maximum length of 1m and can weigh 250kg. Adult females lay between 120-140 eggs at one time. Green Turtles are regularly found on the beach at night close to the project. They tend to nest only every few years but when they do they lay several times in one season.

Hawksbill Turtle



The critically endangered Hawksbill Turtle is rarer than the Green Turtle. It is also much smaller reaching a maximum length of 90cm and weighing 50-70kg.

The Hawksbill gets its English name from its narrow head and bird-like beak, which is used to catch animals hiding in small crevices. It is a regular visitor to Sri Lanka and other tropical and sub-tropical waters.

Although one of the smaller species of sea turtle, it is renowned for its beautiful shell, which is made up of 13 symmetrical pieces and is very colourful. Sadly this has made it a target for traders - Hawksbill Turtle shell is the sole source of commercial "tortoise-shell".

Loggerhead Turtle



The Loggerhead Turtle is rare in Sri Lanka and is more commonly found on the East Coast of America. They are usually red and brown in colour and as its name suggests, is easily identifiable because of its large head!

It grows to a maximum size of 1m and weighs 170-200kg. They are primarily carnivores and its large muscular jaws are ideal for crushing molluscs and crustaceans.

Olive Ridley Turtle



This turtle is endangered because the population depends on the security of a small number of beaches found in the Indian, Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. They have been heavily hunted in the past for their meat and hide.

The smallest of the sea turtles and one of the two species of ridley turtle, the Olive Ridley reaches a maximum size of 65cm and weighs 35-45kg. It is named after its olive/rust coloured shell.

Olive Ridley Turtles nest yearly and many lay their eggs on the project's beach, depositing more than 150 at one time. They are omnivores, eating crustaceans, fish and some marine vegetation.

Leatherback Turtle



This critically endangered turtle is the largest of the 5 species and is a rare find in Sri Lanka. It remains on the brink of extinction.

It is easily identifiable due to its long front flippers and unique black and white stripy shell - its carapace is in fact a layer of thin, tough, rubbery skin peppered with thousands of bone plates giving it a leathery appearance. It is the only sea turtle that lacks a hard shell.

In addition they have a unique blood circulatory system for a cold-blooded reptile which means they are able to keep their blood warm even in cold waters using metabolic heat from their muscle activity.

The Leatherback reaches a maximum length of 3m and a weight of 750kg. Their unique flexible carapace and its seven ridges enable them to dive to depths of 1500m in search of their favourite food, the jellyfish.

Around 5 Leatherback Turtles are known to nest at the beach each year.