

SEA TURTLE CONSERVATION IN HONG KONG SAR*

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Among the 7 sea turtle species in the world, 5 species are recorded in Hong Kong. They are green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*), olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*), loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*) and hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*). Green turtle is the most commonly observed and the only species that nests in Hong Kong. The regular nesting site situates at a sandy beach of 0.5 ha called Sham Wan of an island named Lamma Island at the southeastern part of Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, nesting season of green turtle lasts from June to October. From 1998 until present, 3-7 clutches of eggs were delivered by female green turtle in a nesting season every 1 to 5 years. Each clutch of about 100 eggs was laid at an interval of 12 to 14 days in a nesting season. The nesting beach Sham Wan is designated as a "Restricted Area" under local law, the (Cap. 170), which forbids entry during the green turtle nesting season to protect nesting turtles and their eggs from June to October. During nesting season, nature wardens of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) of the HKSAR government regularly conduct day-time as well as night-time patrol on the beach at Sham Wan of Lamma Island. In addition to local law protection and enforcement, a number of conservation measures have been undertaken to safeguard the well-being of sea turtles in Hong Kong. Before the onset of nesting season each year, management works are carried out in Sham Wan the nesting site. These include removal of weeds which hinder turtles coming ashore to nest, regular monitoring of the site conditions and collection of refuse on the beach, etc. To identify the migratory routes of the nesting green turtles, AFCD has commenced satellite tracking programme on green turtles since 2002. 3 post-nesting satellite trackings have been conducted so far. According to the satellite tracking record, the same female green turtle migrated to its foraging ground in Vietnam in 1-month's time after nesting at Sham Wan in both 2003 and 2008. On occasion turtle eggs are threatened by external environmental factors in the natural nesting beach, namely inundation due to heavy rainfall, artificial incubation of the eggs in laboratory conditions would be put in place to enhance the hatching success. Since 1998, over 600 hatchlings artificially incubated have been released from Sham Wan for their return to the sea. We recognize the success for conserving sea turtles greatly hinges on public reports on sea turtle sightings or strandings. Public engagement in sea turtle conservation works has been promoted and reinforced through educational occasions from public seminars, leaflet dissemination to hands-on experience in volunteer work, such as clean-up of nesting beach prior to onset of nesting season.



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