

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON SEA TURTLES IN '88

THE MARINE TURTLES IN CHINA

1988 REVIEW

by

TAN YAN XIANG

JULY 30 - AUGUST 3, 1988

The Status of Research and Conservation of Marine Turtles in China

Huang Chu-chien, Tan Yan Xiang,
Institute of Zoology,
Academia Sinica

Wang Xiao Yan
Bureau of Fisheries Management
Ministry of Agriculture

Five marine turtles are found in the coast of China, namely: Chelonia mydas, Eretmochelys imbricata, Caretta caretta gigas, Lepidochelys olivacea and Dermodochelys coriacea. Chelonia mydas is most abundant, and nests in the coast of the Southchina sea island, southeast part of Hainan Island and some beaches along Guangdong province.

Because of the high economic value of the marine turtles, it's population is decreasing rapidly. Coastal residents are accustomed of eating meat and eggs of sea turtles; shells are used for medicine or made into arts and crafts. With the increasing population of humanbeings in the coastal areas, turtles have less place to survive, only a few areas remain for the species to breed, and is in danger or extinction somewhere. The status of Chinese sea turtles is of world wide concern, national and international authorities have attached importance to this resource.

No thorough in investigations of the patterns, distribution and migrations had been done for a long time until recent years. Since Chinese marine turtles are mainly distributed in Southchina sea, China Agriculture Administration conducts a survey of the southsea turtles from April 1987 to the end of 1988 to get the resource status for making protection regulations, promoting, the development and conservation of the resource.

On 21 & 22 March 1987, a working meeting on the survey of the south China sea turtle resources was held in Haikou city, Hainan province. The meeting showed the status of the conservation actions, worked out a research program, also discussed and modified "Manual of Southsea Turtle Research and Conservation Techniques",

especially, a investigation program from April 1987 to March 1989 was adopted.

A. Brief report of the survey

The survey is a major research program of China Ministry of Agriculture, performed by Conservation Station of Southsea Turtle Resources, started in April 1987, and is going to end at the end of 1988.

In the year 1987, in a survey total 184 days were conducted between 20 April to 20 October on Northisland and Southisland of the Xisha Islands, another survey lasted 153 days from 1 June to 31 October at the Seaturtle Bay of Huidong country, Guangdong province. On the two sites measurements and species identification were done to 341 turtles; the number of eggs and hatched eggs were counted in each nest of total 182 nests, 74 turtles were tagged and released; we collected atmospheric phenomena and hydrology materials at the sites during our surveys; in six other islands recorded 126 ascending turtles and 49 nests.

Methods of investigation:

a. Close the beaches in the survey area, and all the fishing boats are stipulated not to go to the investigated islands.

b. Keep day and night watch on ascending turtles, and make records of them, some turtles are tagged and released. Encircle the turtleeggs in hatching period with fishing nest, release the hatchlings after counting the number, at last dig into the sand to see how many unhatched and what caused it.

c. Survey on islands without permanent workers:

Except Southisland and Norethisland, there is no permanent worker of six other islands. On every daytime survey members travel to these islands by boats to record the number of ascending turtles, eggs and hatchlings.

d. Make known to people the importance of seaturtle conservation. Yongxing island which is located 10 km south away from the Qilian islands is the entrance to the Xisha islands, fishing boats often stay at the island waiting for permission, adding supplies or to avoid wind. At this opportunity survey

members often have discussions with fishermen here in order to let more people understand the importance of turtles conservation.

In 1988, our plan is not only to investigate the population of the marine turtle resource and historical change of nesting beaches to get a overall knowledge of the resource, but also to continue the survey at the above two working stations which can provide us continuous information of the nesting beaches. Survey in 1988 will last until the end of December, more sites will be investigated, and more tagged turtles will be released.

e. Work of tagging:

In 1987 20 turtles were tagged in Huidong country, 53 in the Xisha islands, and 1 in Dongwan country, all together 74 turtles. The stainless tag is 7 cm long, 1 cm wide with following words on it:

Return: 20 Nancun Rd. Haizhu, Guangzhou, the P.R. China

B. Conservation work on Southsea marine turtles:

a. In May 1986, the Seaturtle Bay of Huidong country was decided to be a seaturtle nature reserve, it has a total area of 4 kilometre square including beaches and the surrounding water, on the border of the reserve a 1000 metre long iron net is installed. Another reserve in the Xisha islands is ready to be built.

Effective management and strict conservation rules have put an end to free capture and killing of marine turtles in the reserve. In 1986, 122 female turtles came ashore laying eggs, 41% more than 1985 (87 female turtles); recorded number of nests is 78, 70% more than 1985 (47 nests) number of hatchlings is 7490, 87% more than 1985 (3933 hatchlings).

b. Primary experiments on the raising of hatchlings to increase the survival rate have started in 1985. 100 hatchlings are cultured in a 18 metre square tank, 52 of them live over winter in 1986, and 41 of 93 hatchlings live over winter in 1987.

c. In 1986, only seaturtles in the reserve were under protection, in other places of Guangdong province hunting and killing still existed. Over hunting in the Xisha islands were not stopped; things were even worse in the Nansha islands; in the Donsha islands due to the exploitation of new fisheries, turtle resources are also destroyed. Fishermen from Qionghai country, Hainan province had captured 2034 turtles in the Xisha islands and Donsha Islands until the end of 1986. In many countries seaturtles were sold on fairs, so what we need is effective action to protect marine turtles in a wide rang. The "Law of fishing", "Regulation of Breeding and Protection of Quantung Resources", "Methods of Conservation of Seaturtles Resources" are being carried out, and widely publicized to people.

The marine turtle is a international resource, China government has written to WWF & IUCN requesting for assistance for conservation work, we believe that cooperation and exchange of experiences between countries are very important and useful.

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Venue: Hiwasa Community Center, Tokushima Prefecture
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Venue: Himeji Dokkyo University, Himeji-City

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779 - 23, Japan

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Regarding the Publication of the International Sea Turtle Conference Minutes

The minutes of the International Sea Turtle Conference held from July 30, 1988, to August 3, 1988, in Hiwasa-cho, Tokushima Prefecture, and in Himeji City were completed.

At the conference, the preservation of sea turtles was discussed in Hiwasa-cho with the Sea Turtle Museum playing a central role in the discussions. Activities of the Municipal Aquarium served as the core of discussions in Himeji, which focused on the uses and conservation of sea turtles, with talks mainly centered on the hawksbill turtle.

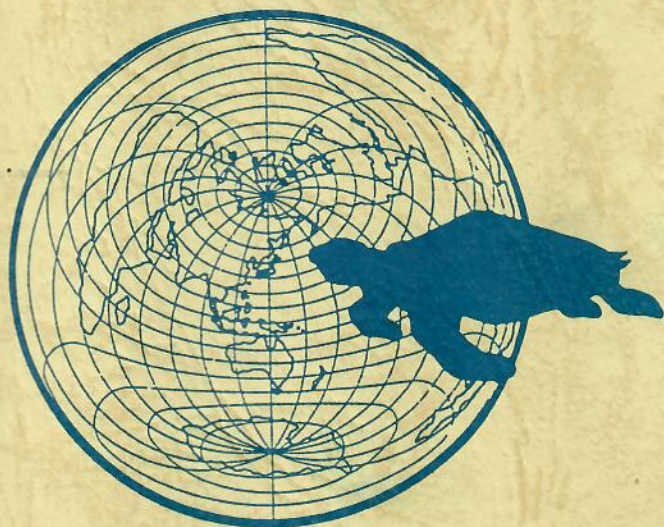
The conference was characterized by attendance and active discussions by researchers, government officials, representatives of the Bekko industry, natural preservation organizations, and the general public. This is the first time that such a conference focussing on sea turtles has been held anywhere in the world. Therefore, it was necessary that the minutes should be published.

We feel great joy at the publication of these minutes, and would like to express our deepest appreciation to all those who have helped in preparing for the conference, its implementation.

Thank you

Conference Representative

Itaru Uchida



INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM
ON **SEA TURTLES** '88

HIMEJI CITY
HIWASA TOWN

菅沼 行雄
Hiroyuki Suganuma

山藤 康男
Yasuo Kondou Japan
Hiwasa

中根 隆博
Nakane Takahiro

Shimizu
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