



TURTLE TROUBLES

Many people living in the coastal areas of Papua New Guinea will have seen a turtle and eaten its meat.

But perhaps not so many people know that the number of turtles in the sea around the country is getting smaller.

If we are not careful in the years to come there will be no turtles left to hunt.

Turtles have always played an important part in the lives of many coastal people. They are used for food, traditional exchanges, feasts, ornamentation and exchanging for food from inland villages.

In the past the number of turtles remained fairly steady and old traditions helped with the conservation of turtles.

For example, a village would have its own traditional hunting areas and no-one else would go there.

In other places it was tambu for people who believed they were the descendants of turtles to eat their meat. Sometimes when a turtle

hunter or important man in the village died no-one would be allowed to hunt for turtles.

But today a lot of the old traditions are dying out. People now hunt turtles and take their eggs all the year round.

This started happening during the Second World War when there was not much food about. People started eating turtle meat and broke their traditional rules for the harvesting of the animals.

In the East Sepik it had been tambu to eat turtles for families who thought they were descended from them. But the hunger of the war years made them start eating the meat.

The other main reason for the breakdown of traditions has been the introduction of money.

In villages close to major towns, money started being used instead of the barter system. Goods are now being bought and sold — not shared and exchanged. People find they need money to buy goods, so they hunt for lots of turtles which they can sell for money.

This money is then used to buy outboard motors, nylon nets and hurricane lamps so villagers can catch even more turtles.

The result of this is that too many turtles are being hunted. More and more nesting mothers are being killed, so the animals are not able to breed and keep their numbers up.

There are only seven types of turtles alive in the world today and in PNG you will find six of these groups. This makes the turtles around our country important and many people want to stop them all being killed.

The turtles you will find here are: green turtles; hawksbills; leatherback turtles; Olive Ridley turtles; loggerhead turtles and flatback turtles. The Wildlife Division has started up the Marine Turtle Project (MTP) to find ways of protecting turtles, while still making sure that there are enough for the villagers to hunt.

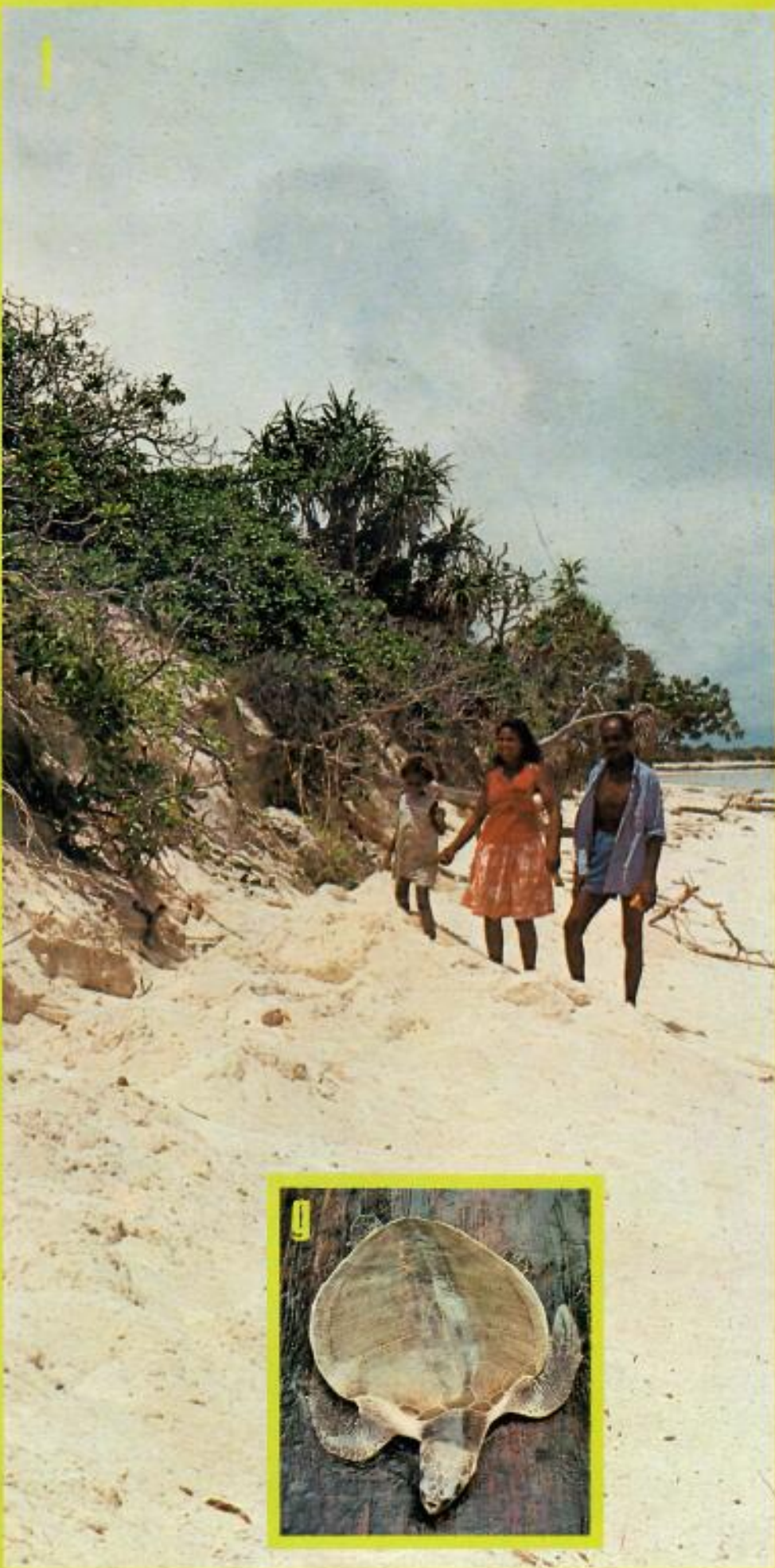
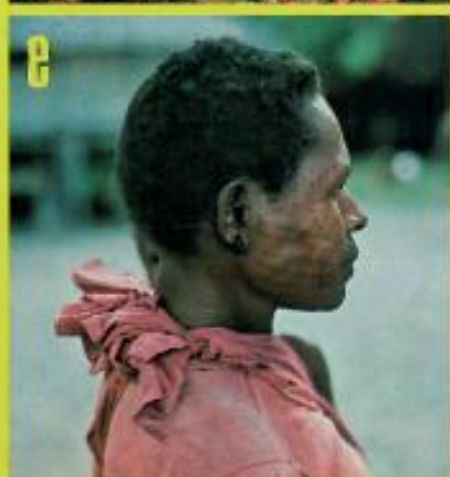
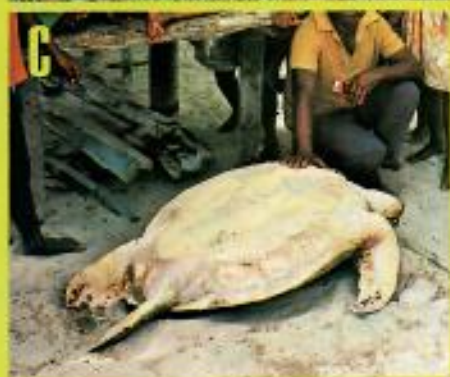
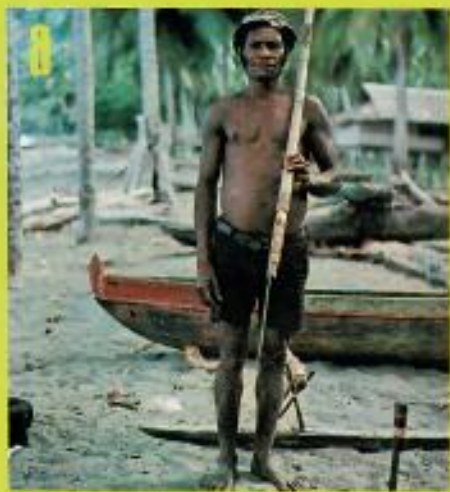
In next month's New Nation we will look at the work being done by the Marine Turtle Project.

The pictures opposite show:

- A) A magic man from Turubu village, ESP, shows how to use a harpoon to spear a turtle.
- B) Hawksbill and green turtle shells on sale to tourists in Port Moresby.
- C) Green turtles caught for food by villagers on Fisherman's Island.
- D) Green turtle cut up ready to sell at Koki market in Moresby.
- E) Tortoise shell jewellery.
- F) Turtle nests which have been dug up to collect the eggs on Fisherman's Island.
- G) Olive Ridley turtle caught by a prawn trawler in the Guld of Papua. Photo: David Gwyther.

All pictures, except G, taken by Sylvia Spring.

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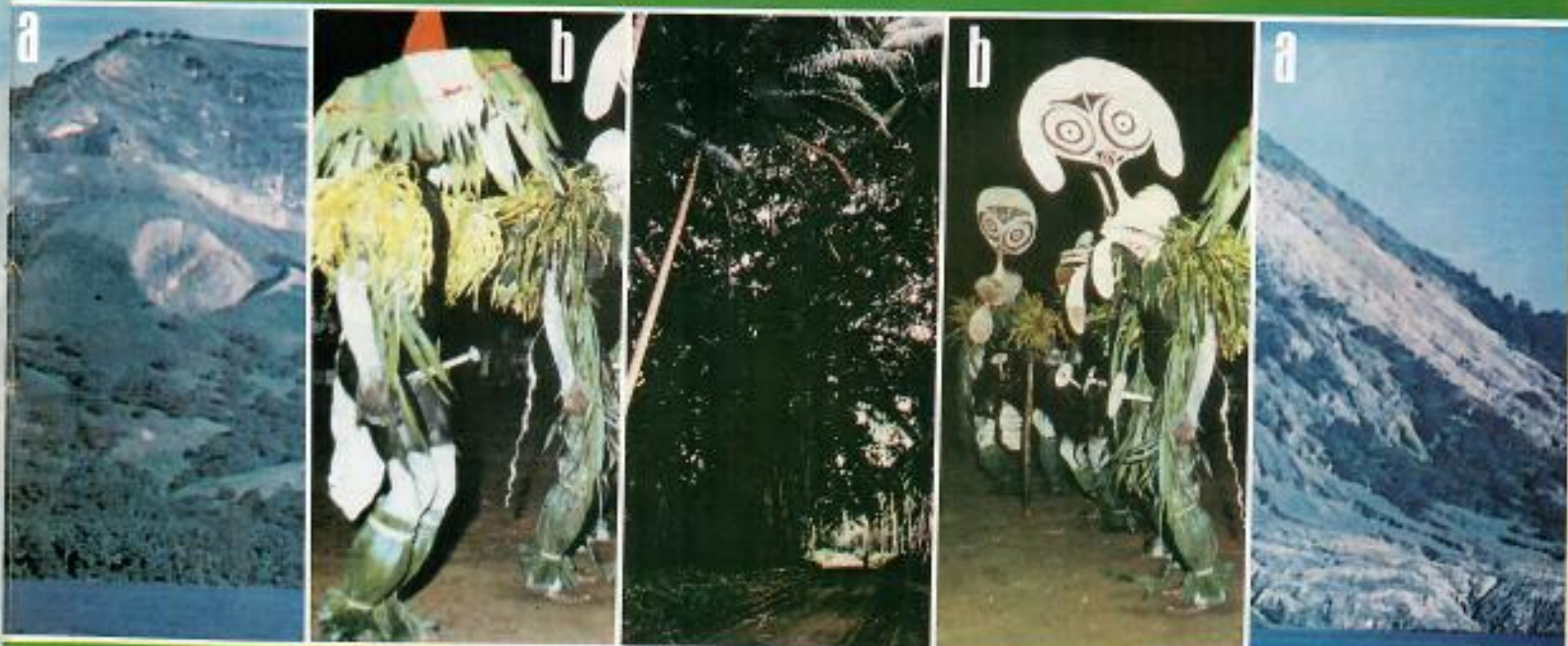


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Frangipani Festival



Photos:
A) Matupit crater
B) Fire dance at Rabaul

Every year in East New Britain a popular and colourful festival is held. It is to remember the day when the volcano, Matupit, erupted and Vulcan Island came out of the sea.

The celebration has been called the Frangipani Festival because after the volcano exploded and ruined the area, this bush was the first to flower.

There are still people alive today who remember the terrible days in 1937 when Matupit exploded.

Although people living in the area ran away from their homes to safe places, about 600 villagers were killed.

Vulcan Island was just a small piece of land near the mainland before Matupit erupted. It had been made during

an earlier eruption in 1878 when it just appeared out of the sea.

But in 1937 an amazing thing happened again to Vulcan Island. The land became active and began to rise out of the water. This lasted for about five days and when it finished rising a volcano 1,200 ft. high had been made. Hot boulders were tossed out from the crater of the volcano during the activity and they crashed back to earth and into the sea.

Many villagers who had rushed to Kokopo and Nodup for safety, returned to their homes about three weeks after the eruptions had stopped.

Now, every year, the Frangipani Festival acts as an anniversary to mark the time when the erupting volcanoes caused such trouble.



C) Singing at Kokopo



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July 1979

Vol 3 No. 6

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