

Turtle Conservation In Sri Lanka – Turtle Nesting Beaches



Turtle Watching In Sri Lanka

Five out of the seven species of sea turtles come ashore to nest in **Sri Lanka**, making it an ideal country to go **Turtle Watching**. They are the **Green Turtle**, **Leatherback**, **Hawksbill**, **Loggerhead** and the **Olive Ridley**. All 5 species have been recorded to nest along specific areas of **Sri Lanka's** coast. The months between **January** and **July** are the peak laying season.

Turtle Nesting Project At Rekawa

The **Turtle Conservation Project (TCP) of Sri Lanka** started its pioneering conservation programme at **Rekawa** in 1996. The '**Turtle Watch**' project aims to protect sea turtles in their natural habitat while providing an alternative source of income to people formerly dependent on the illegal collection of turtle eggs. Previous to '**Turtle Watch**', **Rekawa** was rich in resources but suffered from overexploitation, such as poaching turtle eggs, in order to support the families of community members.

TCP works towards the establishment of a sustainable "in-situ" nest protection (in the natural environment) and research programme in **Rekawa**. Nowadays **Sri Lanka's Department of Wildlife** is in charge of the project and their range officers collect and move the eggs, just after laying, to a protected area on **Rekawa Beach** (ex-situ protection).



Hawksbill Turtle



Turtle Emerging From The Sea

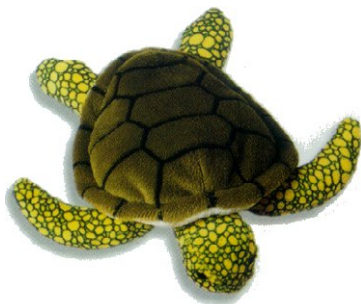
Watching Turtles Come Ashore At Night

Turtles are very nervous when they are looking for a place to nest and can therefore be easily scared. The turtle can only be approached when she starts laying the eggs because by then she is engaged in a very mechanical, almost trance-like behaviour and it is unlikely for her to be frightened by spectators. This activity involves some waiting and some walking on the beach because as with all of nature, it is the turtle (not us) that sets the time and place of the event! The whole process of a nesting turtle can take up to 3 hours and can include 'false crawls' (non-nesting emergence). Of course there is no guarantee that the turtles come to nest every night, but sitting on a deserted beach under the open starry sky is an incredible experience in itself.

More About Turtle Nesting

Turtles mate at sea. Hatchlings in the same nest may have different fathers, as each female mates with several males, which gives the species a degree of genetic advantage. Each mature female will try to return to the "rookery", or nesting beach, where she hatched. There she will lay five or six batches of eggs at fortnightly intervals, averaging a hundred and twenty eggs per batch, on alternate years. Six or seven hundred eggs every two years might sound excessive, but few will survive to become adult turtles. The mother covers her eggs with sand, rests for an hour and a half, and then laboriously drags her body back down the beach to swim away. From that moment, she abandons them to the dispassionate care of Mother Nature. Predators abound. Dogs dig and gorge on eggs. Lizards burrow below the sand for them. Men mark the turtles' tracks and sell the eggs at market as a delicacy. Some eggs are infertile; some fail to hatch.

Hatchlings emerging after the sixty-day gestation period 'float' to the top of the nest, rather than digging their way up. As the turtles move, their struggle to emerge from their shells causes sand to fall through the egg-pile: the turtles rise to the top. Sand temperature is significant in the hatching process. Gender is determined by temperature: below 29 degrees, turtles will become male, above 29 degrees they will be female. Most hatchlings stay an inch or two below the surface of the sand until the temperature drops at night.



Turtle Conservation Project At Rekawa Website

<http://www.tcpsrilanka.org>