

Hawksbill turtles

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I stand unwavering on the sand as miniature pinstriped sails drift along the serene, beckoning body of water. The bubbly, cobalt blue waves lull the turtles as they hit the shoreline and recede once again. In a soothing voice, my grandmother informs me that the sea, with its tropical, lukewarm waters serve as home to the hawksbill turtles.

To justify her claim, a hawksbill turtle with an “ elongated heart-shaped carapace” treads along the brim of the sea water (7). The turtle chooses a barren, deserted patch of sand and gently nudges each of her eggs in after cautiously digging a pit. Then, the turtles slowly dip their heads in the sea and disappear inwards. After sixty days have passed, frail black cracks trickle along the sides of the eggs. A fluffy, tapered head peeps up and a flipper slaps ruthlessly at the barren ground.

As the hatchling takes its initial steps, a flock of gulls fly voraciously above. Sensing prey, the gulls sweep inward headfirst and ineptly cling to the baby turtle’s carapace. The hatchling lets out a shrill cry of anguish and helplessly waves its mini flippers as it is held captive, unable to complete the arduous journey to the glittering body of water. Findings in the Oryx journal reveal that biologists consider these hawksbill turtle species to be “ essentially extinct in the eastern Pacific [..

.] now considered the rarest marine turtle in the region” (2). Hawksbill turtles are known to be a critically endangered species because thousands of them fall prey to numerous animals including raccoons and gulls and nets. The United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) mainly attributes the “ incidental capture, injury, and mortality during fishing

operations” for the rapid decline in the population of sea turtles (9). The fishermen typically used mechanical shrimp trawls, which to their dismay, accidentally trapped sea turtles.

As a potential solution, the NOAA designed turtle excluder devices (TEDs), which would enable sea turtles to slide through a trap door in nets, allowing shrimp fisherman to successfully lure a group of shrimp instead (9). Because the TEDs were proven to be “ ninety-seven percent effective at excluding turtles” when experimented, all shrimp trawls in the United States were required to proactively use the TEDs (9). There are even workshops available worldwide by NMFS to assist fishermen in ensuring that the TED is securely fastened in each net casted for shrimp fishing. However, many shrimp fishermen refuse to cooperate and choose to neglect usage of the TEDs, which results in “ 150, 000 turtles of all species killed in shrimp trawls and large numbers drowned in gill nets” (4). Because countries have not yet created a useful, efficient program like TED, an advocacy for the conservation of sea turtles does not exist in a global context. Humans’ harvest for consumption and poaching is another significant factor for the failed conservancy of the hawksbill turtles.

Admired for their glowing gold shells, hawksbill turtles were hunted endlessly over centuries to craft and trade bracelets, necklaces, and other ornaments (6). Due to the population of turtles decreasing by “ ninety percent over the past hundred years,” a conservation effort known as the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) was established to prohibit the trading, manufacturing, and obtaining of turtle shells (5). Although illegal, the hunting of turtle shells continues to be <https://assignbuster.com/hawksbill-turtles/>

a popular tradition held throughout the world. For instance, in Japan, the traditional wedding dress is intricately crafted and sewn using pieces of the honey colored hawksbill shell. Because the shells play a cultural significance in Japan tradition, hawksbill turtles were commonly sold and imported throughout Asia, which drastically contributed to the “ international trade of hawksbill turtles and resulted in the sharp decline that occurred in the twentieth century” (5).

Furthermore, in communities along large bodies of water, hawksbill sea turtles have become a major source of food. Poaching is considered a common activity in Central America and Asia during nesting season. It is typical for hunters to “ comb the beaches at night” and then “ wait until the female has deposited her eggs to kill her” (5). Sea turtle eggs are also consumed in great numbers during religious holidays. Around Easter holiday, many inhabitants of Mexico search for and eventually consume up to “ 5, 000 sea turtles and other seafood” (5). Despite that programs such as CITES have been established, many inhabitants and traders choose to continue their religious/traditional practices and and not take part in conservation efforts.

Oil spills threaten the life cycles of hawksbill turtles as well. On April 20, 2010, the drilling platform of BP Deepwater Horizon exploded in the Gulf of Mexico, resulting in millions of gallons of crude oil being dumped for nearly three months (8). The contaminated Gulf of Mexico served as home to a wide array of sea animals including dolphins and hawksbill turtles. During the Gulf spill, approximately “ one thousand sixty-six sea turtles were collected in the spill area” and of those, nearly five hundred were drenched in oil (8). The <https://assignbuster.com/hawksbill-turtles/>

turtle hatchlings were impacted the most since they tend to shelter themselves from predators using sargassum.

The sargassum, a type of seaweed is a common habitat for young turtles (8). The lack of sargassum on the ocean's surface due to deficiency of sunlight not only left the hatchlings more prone to predators, but led to a lack of vegetation commonly used for breeding and feeding. Many hatchlings met a gruesome fate since they had were left unsheltered and depleted of basic necessities in the ocean. Hawksbill turtles play a central role in the maintenance of ecosystems. Their naturally sharp, bird like tipped nose allows them to feed upon marine sponges (7).

By working to extract sponges from the reefs, hawksbill turtles promote the growth of underwater plants such as corals. However, the lack of sea turtles leads scientists to predict that " most Caribbean coral reefs may disappear in the next twenty years, primarily due to the loss of grazers in the region" (7). Similarly, there has been a rapid decline in sea grass beds as well. Sea turtles help to maintain the healthy states of seagrass by trimming down the older blades, which reduces mold and slows the rate of decomposition (1). Most importantly, the maintenance completed by sea turtles supplies nitrogen to the roots located deep within the ocean, which benefits an array of animals and plants. Without sea turtles, sea grass beds would be virtually nonexistent, causing an imbalance in " marine food webs and the facilitation of nutrient cycling from water to land" (1).

Such a loss in food productivity would eventually affect reef fish and human beings who seek the food abundant in protein. Although hawksbill turtles can

be seen roaming around the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, these breath taking creatures are nearly extinct. In order to save the turtles, the public needs to be informed about the misuse of shrimp fishing trawls, the dangers of human poaching, and the effects of disasters such as oil spills. Once knowledgeable about the factors contributing to the decline in sea turtles' population, individuals can take part in organizations and foundations established for preserving these creatures. Organizations such as the Sea Turtle Conservancy provide truly fulfilling experiences.

With more people becoming informed about the programs and taking initiative, hopefully a safer, litter free habitat and careful nesting watch can exist. Such clean beaches guarded from predators can promote the growth of the hawksbill turtles and no longer classify them as "critically endangered." As an informed individual, join a local program to donate or volunteer work hours to save the lives of these precious, mistreated species.

5 Hope for Hawksbill Turtles Sueann Lee Works Cited (1) Calver, Photo Tim.

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