

SEA TURTLE CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERING



SRI LANKA

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QMUL Expedition Fund Report



Barbara
2nd year BSc Biomedical Sciences
School of Biological and Behavioural Sciences
Faculty of Science and Engineering
Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry
Queen Mary University of London

VOLUNTEERING & LEARNING

Threats to Sea Turtles I came across on the south coast of Sri Lanka-Akurala Beach
fishing gear | illegal trade of eggs | plastic waste | global warming | turtle sanctuaries

My Duties & Responsibilities:

Beach Clean

Cleaning the beach is a vital part of sea turtle conservation. If the beach is full of plastic, the turtle may decide not to release her eggs or even get trapped on her way mostly by fishing nets and big pieces of plastic.



I filled up 1 or 2 bin bags a day



Night Beach Patrol & Morning C-sensus

The two types of turtles we had on our beach were the **Green Turtle** (*Chelonia mydas*) and the **Olive Ridley** (*Lepidochelys olivacea*).

These turtles lay and bury their eggs on the beach at night to strategically avoid being seen by predators, however, locals on this beach take the eggs and sell them as a delicacy.

Every night and every early morning, we walked up and down the beach looking for tracks from a turtle and her buried eggs to safely take them to our hatchery. Unfortunately, during my shifts, I didn't come across any eggs.

my volunteering organisation buys these eggs from locals for a premium price

Night Watcher & Waddling

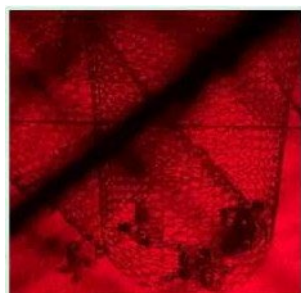
In our hatchery, we had 30 sets of buried eggs that could hatch at any time during the night, it was important for us to spot the hatching and release them to the ocean as soon as possible.



We always used red torch and were very quiet because hatchlings follow the moon light and the sound of the ocean.

Sand temperature determines the turtle's sex, therefore half of the hatchery was shaded.

We had records of hatched egg count and timeline of hatching for statistical purposes.



only 1 in 1,000 hatchlings survive to adulthood



Hatchlings measuring & releasing

With each set of hatchlings, we performed a random sampling (depending on the number of hatchlings, we usually selected around 15 from each set for measuring and weighting).

We then immediately released them.

Each set of eggs had its own online and hard copy with all the information and statistics such as turtle name, egg count, hatchling count, sand temperature, time of hatching, location on the beach.



This information is then sent to the government office in hopes of making stronger laws and raising awareness of this endangered species.

English teaching & school painting

In the afternoons, I was volunteering in local primary schools teaching English. Truly rewarding experience!



When I had some free time I painted the walls of a local school.



Personal reflection [!f:]

This experience made my career choices even more difficult because marine biology suddenly seemed very interesting, and I can see myself exploring it further.

My biggest realisation was how difficult it is for a country with economic problems to prioritise endangered species, while its people are struggling to feed their families.

I have seen and experienced various threats to sea turtles. I realised how big is the human impact, especially microplastics, which were very difficult to clean from beaches. I did not find it fair that people living on these beautiful beaches receive tonnes of plastic every morning, which is not even theirs. It is easy to live in London and not care about the plastic waste. Until you see and experience the terrible impact on people and animals in different countries.

Sri Lankan people have been very kind to me and they always talked with so much passion about their country. The children in schools were very invested in learning English and they were very good at geography too. Despite many people never leaving this island, they know so much about different cultures and countries.

Thank you QM Bursaries, Grants and Scholarships Office for selecting my project and helping me fund it.