



ENDANGERED GREEN SEA TURTLES



THE ISSUE

Green turtles are listed as endangered in the IUCN Red List and in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). In the South China region, five species of sea turtle occur, and the green turtle is the only species that nests on beaches in the area.

The number of green turtle nesting on Hong Kong beaches has declined dramatically. Decades ago, green turtles nesting were reported in a number of beaches along the coast of Guangdong, Hainan Island, and Beibu Gulf. Sadly, most of these sites seemed to have been abandoned, and the only known nesting sites on the mainland nowadays are in Huidong and Hong Kong.

Some decades ago, nesting green turtles were observed at many remote beaches and islands in Hong Kong, including Tai Wan (Sai Kung), Tai Long Wan (Shek O), Tung O (Lamma Island) and Sham Wan (Lamma Island). Nowadays, Sham Wan is likely to be the only remaining nesting beach for green turtles in Hong Kong. Between 1998 and 2003, there were 10 records of nesting turtles in Sham Wan, but only two have been documented since 2004. The last sighting was in 2012. No green turtle has returned to Sham Wan to lay eggs in the past six years. However, protection measures for the beach and nearby waters should be maintained in the event that juveniles at sea one day return to nest in Sham Wan.

Sham Wan is designated as a Restricted Area during breeding season and green turtles in Hong Kong are protected under the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance (Cap. 586) and in the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance (Cap. 170), however, the green turtle still faces various threats and considerably more protection and conservation measures are needed.

Hong Kong has one of the two remaining green turtle nesting sites in China. Nesting marine turtles show strong nesting beach fidelity. Therefore, it is critically important to protect the last populations of nesting green turtles along the South China coast. Anthropogenic activities, including marine traffic and light and noise pollution, can prevent female green turtles from nesting. Although the nesting area, a small area of 0.5ha of sandy beach, was designated as a restricted area, no protection was imposed to the adjacent sea area in the bay where female turtles would need to make their way to shore. According to a study from 2013-2015, up to 17 boats were found anchored in the bay during summer weekends, generating high levels of noise. There are frequent reports of visitors entering the beach. Besides recreational activities, fishing activities are not being regulated in Sham Wan bay.

OUR ASK

- Designate South Lamma Island as a marine park and expand the Sham Wan Restricted Area;
- Control human access to the sandy shore and nearby shallow waters to limit disturbance to green turtles, particularly during the summer nesting season;
- Restrict vessel speeds to 5 knots covering the entire Sham Wan Bay to minimize collision risk to turtles in accordance with Marine Department Notice No. 93 of 2010 on Speed in Restricted Zones. The speed limit is 5 knots between 8am and midnight on all days from 1 July to 15 September (both dates inclusive) every year and all other Saturdays and public holidays;

- Study the feasibility of a non-anchoring zone, regulate fishing activities by banning trammel nets and restricting the number of recreational vessels, in particular, during the breeding season;
- Regulate activities such as scuba diving to reduce disturbance to vulnerable habitats, with fishing and recreational boating regulated during breeding season; and,
- Implement weekly clean-ups of ghost nets and marine litter on the beach and nearshore shallow waters.