

Born Zoonoses

***Community Participation in Sea Turtle Conservation – A Case Study in
Kosgoda Coastal Area, Sri Lanka***

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Conservation of sea turtles requires an adequate scientific understanding of the status and dynamics of the population and consideration of the coastal communities' attitudes towards the conservation of this species. Among the seven species of marine turtles, living in the world, five come ashore to nest in Sri Lanka. Sea turtles in the South and Southwestern coastline comprise the largest sea turtle rookeries. The conservation of sea turtles requires greater community participation. This study aims to explore the issues related to sea turtle conservation and map the role of community participation in conservation efforts in the Kosgoda coastal area. Data for the study was collected through primary data collection methods, namely direct field observations, key informant interviews, and a questionnaire survey. The respondents were selected using purposive sampling techniques. A survey was conducted with 50 selected coastal community villagers to determine their attitudes and knowledge about conserving sea turtles and their level of participation. The study found that hatchery-based *ex-situ* conservation is the most important strategy for conserving sea turtles in this area. Accordingly, five hatcheries were visited and the primary aim in maintaining these hatcheries in the study area is mostly profit-oriented ventures, and poor practices were employed at most of these hatcheries. This was highly confirmed during the field observations. As a result of this study, local villagers are well aware of the importance of conserving sea turtles. Also, there is a significant association between familiarity and knowledge about sea turtles, the prevalence of consumptive use of sea turtles, and the level of interest in participatory turtle conservation among respondents. This highlights the need to enhance the role of the community to improve the protection of sea turtles. Therefore, this study provides reliable results to enhance the role of the community in conserving sea turtles and the sustainable conservation of sea turtles in the Kosgoda coastal area, Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Sea Turtles, Nesting Habitats, Conservation, Community