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First hatching of Green turtles in southwest Madagascar as a direct result of conservation efforts

August 2008. The emergence of 92 live hatchlings marks the success of an awareness-raising campaign launched by Blue Ventures two years ago. This aims to find and protect turtle nests along a 50km stretch of coastline south of Morombe.

The hatching of Green Turtles in southwest Madagascar has been witnessed by marine conservationists working for British charity, Blue Ventures Conservation.

In a move unprecedented in southwest Madagascar, residents of the remote village of Lamboara have now voted to protect surrounding beaches, outlawing turtle nest raiding and targeted turtle fishing.

Education paying dividends

"The impact of a small amount of education on the lifecycle and biology of the turtle has been amazing," says marine biologist Charlotte Gough, campaign co-ordinator. "People here understand their resources are being overexploited, and that they need to do something to preserve them for future generations. The residents themselves put forward the idea of protecting whole beaches during the nesting season."

Blue Ventures had been working with the community in Lamboara to guard the nest. A local fisherman reported it after hearing about the organisation's initiative offering a reward for information on nesting activity.

"This is a really important time for me," says the beach's guardian, Lamboaran resident Sosy Kadioko. "When I brought the only two dead hatchlings into the village it was the first time people had ever seen baby turtles."

The Green Turtle - Conservation threats

The Green Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) is found in the waters off southwest Madagascar. The adults are targeted by fishermen and the nests are usually raided for their eggs. Turtle meat is also eaten and nesting females are often caught and killed after they have laid their eggs.

"We thought there were no turtles nesting here anymore. But saving this nest has prompted the village to help preserve a species," says Gough. "Our experience of work in this region is that when one village chooses to do something, others follow. Village presidents from elsewhere are already showing an interest in the turtle project."



Turtle guard, Madagascar. Credit Blue ventures.



Green turtle hatchlings in Madagascar. Credit Blue Ventures.

Nest raiding

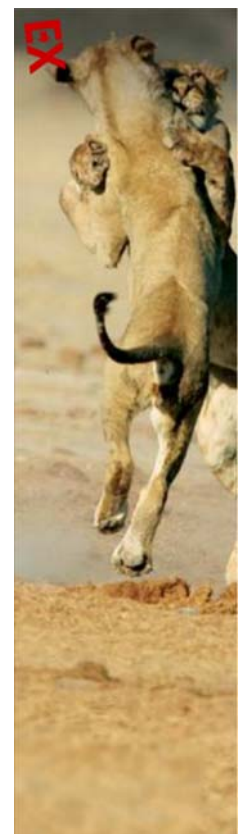
It had been feared that the amount of nest raiding and turtle fishing meant that females were no longer able to reproduce effectively in the area, a situation that may have led to the local extinction of the species. Female Green Turtles return to the beach on which they hatched to lay their own eggs.

Last year Blue Ventures' work with the neighbouring village of Andavadoaka received the United Nations Development

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Community-based marine protected area network

Other marine conservation efforts piloted by Blue Ventures in the region include the creation of Madagascar's first community-based marine protected area network. This initiative is now being used as a blueprint for the creation of 50 further marine reserves in the country, part of an ambitious African Development Bank-funded marine conservation programme.

Blue Ventures Conservation is an award-winning not-for-profit dedicated to working with local communities in Madagascar to conserve threatened marine habitats and resources for the betterment of people and nature. Funded almost entirely through ecotourism revenue, Blue Ventures brings paying volunteers to project sites and trains them in scientific research, community outreach and on-the-ground conservation. Visit us at www.blueventures.org

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