

Status of leatherback turtles in Cambodia

No report on the leatherback turtle was received from Cambodia. While there are historic references to the presence of leatherbacks in the waters off Cambodia (Tirant, 1885 in Bourret 1941), the only available contemporary record of a leatherback turtle sighting in Cambodian waters is from 2001 (Stuart and van Dijk 2002). The animal was captured in a fishing net in the Gulf of Thailand, 1.5km offshore of the southern point of Koh Sra Mauch Island in the Gulf of Thailand, near Sihanoukville (10° 36'N, 103° 31'E) Cambodia (Stuart and van Dijk 2002). The pink spot on the crown of the turtle suggested it was a mature female (Pritchard 1979) and it was 1.8 metres in length. Injuries sustained included superficial lacerations on the flippers from entanglement in the net or manhandling. Messages of good luck and blessings were also engraved into the carapace with stainless steel knives. (Stuart and van Dijk 2002). The turtle was released by the Cambodian Department of Fisheries on the same day of the stranding in 4 m of water near the eastern end of Koh Thmey Island (Stuart and van Dijk 2002).

Although other species such as the green turtle inhabit Cambodian waters and nest on the islands such as Koh Rong (Try et al. 2002), the fishermen claimed never to have come across a leatherback turtle previously (Stuart and van Dijk 2002). Similarly, interviews of fishers from Vietnamese villages close to the Cambodian border could not recall seeing leatherback turtles (Hamann et al. 2005)

In 2002 the Cambodian Department of Fisheries held a workshop on sea turtle research, biology and conservation in Cambodia for delegations from Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam (Try et al. 2002). Tag returns and satellite tracking have identified that marine turtles are shared by and migrate through the water of each of these countries (Chan 2003). A National Action Plan for the conservation of marine turtles and habitats was discussed for Cambodia. With training in tagging and collection of data on marine turtles and their eggs, as well as general beach survey methods, local scientists are now better prepared to gain information to enable Cambodia to meet its goals of long – term legislative and physical protection and conservation of marine turtles in Cambodia (Try et al. 2002). Cambodia is a signatory state to the IOSEA MoU.

References

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