

A SEA TURTLE CONSERVATION REPORT FROM SRI LANKA

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The BCG has supported an **“Awareness programme for the fishermen in the Kalpitiya peninsula, Sri Lanka, on sea turtle conservation and by-catch reduction”** and the following is a summary of the report.

Of the seven species of sea turtles in the world, five come ashore to nest in Sri Lanka. The main threats are egg collection for consumption and accidental by-catch or entanglement of turtles by fishing gear. The eating of turtle meat also still occurs. The main objectives of the programme were:

- a. **To conduct awareness programmes for the fisheries community about the importance of conservation of sea turtles and the law.**
- b. **To change the fishermen’s attitude to release and rescue of affected turtles without killing them.**
- c. **To educate the fishermen on how to release entangled turtles from their nets (mainly gill nets).**
- d. **To make the fishermen aware of the impact of plastic bag litter on turtles.**

Twelve programmes were originally planned. However, funding allowed 36 programmes to be delivered to the local fishing community and school children in the target area, reaching 1,200 adults and 3,600 children. BCG funding also enabled a poster to be printed and distributed.

The team leader noted that there was a greater awareness of environmental issues among school children than when a similar programme was delivered eight years ago, and they are more interested in taking part in voluntary field work.

The project has been a success story. Recent surveys of beaches where turtles would have been butchered for consumption have found no signs of empty turtle shells since the programme was delivered. Fishermen have hung the posters in their homes. Children can become fishermen at 16 years old so the benefits of their new attitude will soon be seen. There have been many requests from schools to organise field activities such as beach cleaning, and it is expected that such activities will be organised in the near future.

