

SEA TURTLES IN EGYPT - STATUS OF THE SEA TURTLE TRADE IN ALEXANDRIA'S FISH MARKET, (PART II)

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A pilot study to evaluate the response of the stakeholders in the sea turtle trade in Alexandria fish market, the most important fish market in Egypt, to different awareness messages. The study determines their area of interest and the most suitable way to deal with them, suggesting practical solutions.

INTRODUCTION

In the Mediterranean most of the southern and eastern coastline has been surveyed to determine main nesting sites. Two surveys were carried out on the north coast of Egypt; Max Kasparek covering the area from Alexandria to El-Salum (1993) and Michael Clarke & Andrew C. Campbell covering the whole Egyptian Mediterranean coastline (2000).

These revealed that nesting figures for marine turtles were low and insignificant compared to other areas in the Mediterranean, with the nests randomly scattered along the entire coastline. Andrew Campbell's survey recorded large numbers of dead turtles washed ashore, suggesting that marine turtles congregate in the inshore waters to feed in the continental shelf sea grass beds.

A recent satellite tracking study by B.J.Godley (2000) to determine the post-reproductive migration of 6 female green turtles after nesting in northern Cyprus, revealed that 5 out of 6 turtles visited Egyptian waters, suggesting that Egypt is an important foraging and wintering area. It is clear, therefore, that it is important to protect the sea turtles in Egyptian waters.

Sea turtle predation is traditional for the inhabitants of Alexandria fish market area. Flower (1933) was the first to record this, mentioning a fairly large loggerhead turtle in the market. Recent observations confirm that the practice continues; Max Kasparek (1993), Laurent et al. (1996), Ozhan (1997) and Venizelos & Nada (1999).

It was found in part 1 of this study that the main consumers of sea turtle products were the fishing community and the uneducated individuals living around the fishmarket. They are considered to be the native Alexandrians; an ethnic society with their own language, accent, traditions, diet and personality, very keen to preserve their cultural identity, discouraging villagers coming from the nearby countryside to work, socialise and marry amongst them.

They have, however, been unable to protect their culture from new immigrants. Sea turtle meat and blood consumption has decreased slowly, however it still occurs.

It also found that in the period from December 1998 to May 1999 more than 135 turtles were slaughtered in the Alexandria fish market (El Anphoshi), with dramatically increased numbers toward the summer season. Most of the sea turtles were adult females, catastrophic for the Mediterranean sea turtle population.

METHODOLOGY

A Questionnaire was filled out after an in-depth interview, as the people get confused and suspicious having their opinions written down in front of them.

According to Philip Kotler, each culture consists of smaller subcultures that provide more specific identification and socialisation for their members.

The stakeholders of the sea turtles trade were divided into three subgroups according their attitude, life style and age group, the first subgroup were the fishermen and the wholesalers, second the sea turtle blood and meat consumers, and third the school children.

The interview was carried out in 4 stages:

Who we are and what we do. - To break the barriers with the target group, gaining their confidence.

The sea turtle problems and the core awareness messages.

1. The life cycle of the sea turtles, species in the Mediterranean, life span, nesting sites and feeding areas.
2. Threats facing the sea turtles like destruction of the nesting sites, injury or death as a result of fishery practice, compaction of sand by vehicles and walkers, predation of man on turtles meat and eggs, and water pollution.
3. The main awareness messages that can be used to persuade them to stop this practice, religion, law, medical hazards, biodiversity, and tourism.

Target group opinions and reasons.

According to Philip Kotler “people hear what they want to hear”, and will be mainly interested and willing to pay attention to the things that are originally found in their area of interest. The target subgroups would be convinced only by messages that match their interests and point of view, otherwise they will not respond.

The target group response.

Measuring the percentage acceptance of the awareness messages for each subgroup, determining the most effective message for change, and the most significant reason for unwillingness to change.

The five messages that were given in the in-depth interview were:

- The importance of saving the sea turtles to biodiversity.
- The International and national laws to prevent the sea turtle trade.
- The religious view of killing an endangered species and the Islamic view of blood consumption.
- The relationship between the sea turtles and jellyfish, and its effect on tourism.
- The hazards of drinking blood on human health.

RESULTS

- (24) of (45) fishermen were willing to stop the trade in sea turtles (53.3%)
- (37) of (56) sea turtle consumers were willing to stop eating sea turtles (66%)
- (54) of (63) children (12-16 yrs) were willing to stop eating sea turtles. (85.7%)

The five reasons given by the fishermen who were unwilling to change:

- Sea turtles are a source of income
- It is a very delicious meal
- We find blood good for our health.
- Turtle meat is part of our traditions
- I do not care

The five reasons given by the meat and blood consumers and the school children who were unwilling to change.

- It is a very delicious meal
- We find blood good for our health.
- Turtle meat is part of our tradition
- I do not care
- Others

ANALYSIS

The data showed a great variance between the responses of each subgroup to the awareness messages.

The fishermen were less convinced compared to the sea turtle consumers and the children, however more than 53% of them were convinced, which is a very positive sign. The religious and legal considerations were the most effective messages for this subgroup. The reasons driving some of them to insist on slaughtering the turtles were their dependence on it as a source of income, and tradition.

The sea turtle blood and meat consumers, gave a good response (66%). Religion and the medical hazards of using blood as a tonic were the most effective messages. Tradition and the good taste of sea turtle meat were the main reasons for reluctance to change.

The school children had the best response (85.7%). The most effective messages to this subgroup were the importance of the sea turtle to biodiversity, the religious point of view, and the relation between the jellyfish and the sea turtle. The main reason for refusal to change was the good taste of the sea turtle.

CONCLUSION

Each of the stakeholders of the sea turtle problem in Alexandria fish market has his own point of view and reason, therefore any public awareness campaign should be designed to target each subgroup separately, taking into account their cultural background. It is clear that religion is a major influence on all the target groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i) Establish targeted awareness campaigns directed at the fishermen, meat and blood consumers, children and local NGOs
- ii) Local police and the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA) should monitor the sea turtle trade in the Alexandria fish market.
- iii) The Muslim and the Christian priests should adopt an action plan aimed to increase awareness of the locals and the fishermen about the importance of protecting an endangered species and the hazards from using blood as a tonic.
- iv) Ministry of Tourism should design a campaign highlighting the effect of the jellyfish on tourism and the relation between the jellyfish and the sea turtle.
- v) Ministry of the Education should target schools in the area of the fish market and focus on the importance of biodiversity and the relationship between the jellyfish and the sea turtle.
- vi) Enforcement of the current National Environmental law # 4 /1994, Act 28.

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