

Project Update: December 2012

Madagascar - Vezo turtle fishers take the lead in the protection of marine turtles

Marine turtles constitute an integral aspect of the Vezo cultural heritage throughout the coastal region of Southwest Madagascar. These indigenous semi-nomadic communities have various consumptive taboos that involve turtle meat, such as the use of turtle meat by older males for advancement to the position of elder and/or leader.

Given the high cultural value of turtle meat, one would assume the demand to be minimal due to the low percentage of males in the community that could potentially fulfil this role. However, recent research has revealed that the capture, trade, and wholesale of turtle meat is becoming widespread, suggesting that *all* segments of society may be partaking in its consumption that in turn; indicate the erosion of cultural values.

ReefDoctor, a UK NGO has been working alongside the Vezo community for the last 10 years building a strong working relationship with community leaders. This has enabled ReefDoctor to tackle issues of high cultural significance such as the hunting and consumption of marine turtles. ReefDoctor's turtle (FANO) project collates ethnographic information to assess patterns of turtle-human interactions, alongside biological data on the capture and consumption of marine turtles over the past four-years in the Bay of Ranobe.

On 7th December 2012 the **first grassroots marine turtle management association in Madagascar**, referred to as the ***Fikambanana Paniriky Miaro ny Fano (FI.PA.MI.FA)*** received legal status.

An alliance of turtle fishers, community leaders and elders, **FI.PA.MI.FA** focuses on protecting marine turtles through the strengthening of traditional customs and consumptive taboos that underpin the cultural significance of marine turtles.



'We are Vezo, if our children are to grow-up Vezo then they need to see marine turtles with their own eyes not through the memories of their elders' – Kaokie, leader of the FI.PA.MI.FA elder council.