

Project Update: July 2012

May-June 2012

After successfully being awarded our first RSG, the team have begun to undertake interviews and beach surveys to document illegal turtle poaching in Mozambique.

With the help of two local Mozambican marine conservationists, Fernando and Adamo who work as dive instructors, we began to look for current and former spear fishers to participate in our interviews for information on turtle poaching. So far we have completed, translated and transcribed six interviews with spear fishers ranging in age from 18 to 40. All spear fishers indicated they had poached turtles before, either individually or as part of a team, one fisherman saying he had personally captured and killed over 90 turtles.

An interesting anecdote to arise from these initial sessions includes the story of how one interviewee became a spear fisherman. As a young boy, he was forced to drop out of school to earn money after his father was called by Frelimo, the ruling government to fight in the civil war. As the war spread northwards, many Mozambicans fled to the coastal region of Inhambane to escape. These new people to the region were experienced fishermen and he was spent an over a year in 1986 training to become a spear fisher. When his family found out he had become a spear fisher they were surprised because there was no one else in the family who knew how to swim.



Photo 1 and 2 (respectively): Green turtle plastron found in sand dunes at Tofinio Beach. Spear fishers carry their morning catch, cut up portions of a shark.

June to July 2012

We have begun to interview long-term coastal residents of the Tofo area to collate a historical baseline of local ecological knowledge. These ex-pat residents have shared their knowledge of turtle poaching, nesting and diving interactions. Nine interviews have been completed and a consensus of the participants suggests the last turtle nest seen to successfully hatch along Tofo main beach was in 2006, when a hatchlings emerged from a nest in the early evening on a spring high tide. The hatchlings were swept by the high tide into the Tofo marketplace and then began crawling further inland, attracted by artificial street lighting.

Southern Mozambique has some of the highest vegetated sand dunes in the world and the dense vegetation between dune swales creates ideal hide-away spots for spear fishing camps. Using volunteers to help increase geographic and temporal coverage, we have been conducting surveys of these dune areas looking for evidence of turtle poaching. Detection of turtle poaching during May-July 2012 has been relatively low; only 3 sets of remains have been discovered. Two of the sets of remains were identified as the carapace (shell) of juvenile green turtles (*Chelonia mynas*). In addition, an opportunistic turtle mortality walk was conducted in Pomona, 200 kilometres north of Tofo, by our collaborating whale shark researchers, Clare and Hannah. They patrolled Pomene beach on horseback to survey for evidence of poaching, successfully discovering old remains in which species could not be determined. Pomene is infamous as a turtle poaching and shark fining hotspot, however results of this walk may suggest that the presence of eco-tourism lodges along the coast is discouraging illegal poaching.



Photo 3 and 4 (respectively): Adult green turtle carapace found in sand dunes at Praia de Rocha, Mozambique. Hannah, a whale shark researcher finds the old remains of poached turtle whilst on horseback patrol for poached turtles in Pomene.