

Project Update: June 2021

Two types of questionnaires for the data collection in the field were prepared - community surveys and market surveys. In both types of surveys we also asked respondents about other types of turtle products (eggs, meat, oil) and their use to better understand the connectivity and complementarity of the products. So far, 20 market survey questionnaires and 93 community questionnaires have been collected.

This is a list of visited areas and identified trade where community and market surveys have been conducted:

- Medan: turtle eggs, sometimes tortoiseshell available in markets.
- Pulau Banyak: Christians from Ujung Sialit village poach turtles for meat, sometimes traded to Nias with other turtle parts (including tortoiseshell).
- Padang: high trade with turtle eggs (hawksbill turtle, green turtle), no trade with tortoiseshell found.
- Mentawai islands (South Pagai island, Siberut island): high consumption of all parts, tortoiseshell is locally processed.



A community survey in Bungorayo village in Mentawai archipelago

During the questionnaire survey we have found different patterns of the trade with tortoiseshell and other turtle products in these areas. For example, in South Pagai islands (Mentawai archipelago, tortoiseshell is processed locally with no trade outside the area. Turtle meat and eggs are also mainly for private consumption and they are

part of a regular diet. Contrary to this, in Siberut island (Mentawai archipelago), turtle meat is consumed on special occasions. Even though the tradition does not specifically order turtle meat, the locals prefer turtle meat as it is cheaper and more easily available (e.g. compared to pork meat).

Mentawai islands and Padang used to be one of the hotspots for tortoiseshell trade, and the tortoiseshell souvenirs were in high demand. Nowadays, the trade still persists in the area but in a lower volume. However, fishermen reported to us that it is now harder to catch turtles and that they are generally smaller in size, and thus that tortoiseshell is less lucrative for the fishermen now.

Several methods of catching turtles were described during the community surveys. Turtles can be either caught in fishing nets in their foraging/breeding habitats, taken from the sea while diving, or on the beach during nesting attempts. An old fisherman from South Pagai island that focuses on catching turtles for almost 30 years has shown us a special spear that he used to catch turtles in the sea. The turtles are stabbed when they reach the sea surface to breathe. The spear is similar to a whaling spear. The fisherman described that he used to catch up to 100 turtles per year whilst now it is around 50. To remove tortoiseshell fishermen describe two common techniques. The first one is to use hot water and then peel scutes from the turtle. The second technique is to use a fire to remove scutes. In both techniques, a turtle can be either alive or dead. Fishermen admitted that turtles are sometimes thrown back to the sea alive.

As of our project, we also focus on promoting conservation of hawksbill turtles and initiating talks about conservation steps. We have met, for example, with the leader of Cahaya Maritim NGO, staff and students from Biology Department at Andalas University in Padang, staff from Faculty of Marine and Fisheries from Bung Hatta University in Padang, and with government representatives from BPSPL (Center for Coastal and Marine Resources Management) and LKKPN (National Agency on Marine Conservation) Pekanbaru. In South Pagai islands we have met with local village leaders. During the meetings the importance of sea turtles in the marine ecosystem, illegal turtle trade, and possibilities of cooperation in conservation were discussed. We plan to sign MoU with both universities with Padang and Cahaya Maritime NGO in the second half of this year to promote our cooperation and work together on sea turtle conservation in Western Sumatra.



Meeting with several students from Biology department at Andalas University, Padang and talk about turtle trade in Padang.



A critically endangered juvenile hawksbill turtle caught by a local fisherman in the Mentawai archipelago (Sandin island).