



• Dr Moses Kofi Sam (3rd left), Regional Manager of Central and Western Region of Wildlife Division, with participants in the ceremony. Picture: ESTHER ADJEI

# Wildlife Division expresses concern over reduction in sea turtle population

By Nana Konadu Agyeman,  
ACCRA

**T**HE Ghana Wildlife Division of the Forestry Commission has expressed strong reservation about the manner in which the activities of various beach resorts and hotels along the country's coastline are

Division, Mr Andrew Agyekum, said "turtles are affected negatively by a lot of lights of the resorts that line our beaches as they are prevented from coming to the beach to lay their eggs to replenish.

"However, we can have resorts along our beaches that will ensure that during turtles' nesting season from October to February each year, they will turn off or dim their lights in the night so that the beaches will be dark for the turtles to come and this is a friendly way of living

## Shared responsibility

Mr Agyekum noted that the country was gradually becoming a popular tourist destination, leading to the emergence of many beach resorts and hotels along the country's 550-km coastline.

Unfortunately, he said, the facilities were sited close to the beaches where the marine turtles had to lay their eggs, taking away the reproductive space for the animals.

turtles and offer them to the resorts and demand money, failure of which they threaten to kill the animals," he revealed.

## Tension

Mr Agyekum pointed out that due to the turtle trade, there was a prolonged tension between wildlife officials and the members of coastal communities, a challenge that endangered the life of wildlife officials.

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**T**HE Ghana Wildlife Division of the Forestry Commission has expressed strong reservation about the manner in which the activities of various beach resorts and hotels along the country's coastline are reducing the population of sea turtles.

The division said some of the resorts purchased turtles and their eggs from coastal communities, which they showed to tourists for money.

That act, it said, had created lucrative illegal jobs for the members of the communities.

"When these resorts buy turtles' eggs from the communities, they are telling the people that it is alright to go and collect the eggs and bring them, and this is motivating the people to wake up in the morning to look for turtle eggs, knowing that someone will buy these eggs," he said.

## Replenishment

Addressing the 2018 national sea turtle conference in Accra, a marine turtle expert with the Ghana Wildlife

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"However, we can have resorts along our beaches that will ensure that during turtles' nesting season from October to February each year, they will turn off or dim their lights in the night so that the beaches will be dark for the turtles to come and this is a friendly way of living in harmony with turtles," he said.

## Capacity building

The conference aimed at building the capacity of the participants on the appropriate way to care and replenish the stock of sea turtles, as well as ensure a collaboration among stakeholders in the collection of data and information on turtles in the country's waters.

Sponsored by the US Fish and Wildlife Services, USAID and the Florida Gulf Coast University, the event attracted participants from the academia, civil society organisations, the Fisheries Commission, the Wildlife Division and fishing communities.

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"Some community members even go to the extent of collecting the female

turtles and offer them to the resorts and demand money, failure of which they threaten to kill the animals," he revealed.

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Mr Agyekum pointed out that due to the turtle trade, there was a prolonged tension between wildlife officials and the members of coastal communities, a challenge that endangered the life of wildlife officials.

"We have had several cases where workers of non-profit organisations went to communities to tell the people to release turtles they had caught into the sea and they pounced on the members of the NGOs and beat them up.

Mr Agyekum further stated that sand winning activities along the beaches were also destroying the nestle habitat for sea turtles.

Dr Phil Allman, from the Florida Gulf Coast University, said the presence of sea turtles played an important role in the marine ecosystem as turtles fed on organisms that preyed on fish, saying "if you have more sea turtles feeding on those predators, you will have more fish.

"When you have healthy turtles, you have healthy habitats and when you have healthy habitats, you have healthy fish population," he added.



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