

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2009

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# Save The Sea Turtles

The future of the sea turtles in the Anambas Islands is in dire straits: Find out what you can do to save them from extinction.

By **Abigail Alling, President PCRF**



Dr. Wallace J. Nichols

**D**r Wallace J Nichols, or just "J" to his friends, joined us in Anambas for a week. J speaks softly and gently, but with words that strike to the core of an issue and leave you with the understanding of his fierce passion towards environmental protection, community conservation and a concern for the seven species of sea turtles that are all endangered. With

J in hand, we met with school children, fishermen and the local government to discuss the decline and future of the sea turtles in Anambas.

There are at least two species of sea turtles that nest on several beaches in Anambas – the hawksbill and the green turtles. Green turtles eat mostly jellyfish, migrate to distant shores, feed in one location and nest in another. Hawksbill turtles generally migrate less, eat primarily sponges and sea grass while nesting in the same geographic area. Sea turtles are important to reef and marine ecology. They tend lagoon gardens and coral reefs – the "rainforests of the sea".

Durai Island, just northwest of Terempah, is about half a mile long and is the nesting home of both species. Thousands of nesting turtles arrive there throughout the year, with the peak season between July and September. Both green and hawksbill turtles nest together, at night, laying a hundred or more eggs in large holes on the beach. Hatchlings emerge about two months later usually at night or in the early morning light.

Sea turtles mature to have eggs when they are about 20 years old or more. They will continue to produce eggs every three years or so until their death at around 80 years. If the turtle survives

Durai Beach



Hawksbill Baby Turtle



Classrooms in Anambas

the incubation period and hatches, the most challenging time in its life would be to make its way out of the nest, down to the shoreline and across the reef where fish, birds and other prey are waiting. Once past the reef, only then does the turtle have some chance of survival in the open sea.

For the turtles in Anambas, most never make it to hatching. Almost 100 percent of the eggs are diligently gathered the night they are laid and sold at the local market within 24 hours. The eggs are then boiled and their contents are sucked out of the soft leathery shells. Allegedly, some people also catch adult turtles, cook them and eat the meat using its shell as a bowl. Years of egg harvesting have taken their toll and now these sea animals are disappearing.

Thankfully, the people of Anambas care. School children ran unabashed towards J enthusiastically wishing to join the first "sea turtle club". Town council members offered to help us establish a sea turtle conservation programme and a visit with Dr T Mukhtaruddin, Bupati Anambas (Head of the Anambas Region) to win his support. It is incredibly fortuitous that we befriended a remarkable woman, Ibu Nina Marlina, Head of Premier Oil's Community Development Programme. Along with guidance from Francis Lee, President of Raffles Marina, and Dr. Aji Sularso, we hope to protect Durai Island and work with the Anambas Government to steward its first marine protected area. Together, we hope this programme will become a center for education and skill-based training for people to learn how to become helpful stewards of the oceans and its beautiful sea turtles.

*Please continue to join the voyage and learn more about the Anambas Islands at [www.pcrf.org/](http://www.pcrf.org/)*