VESS
VANUATU ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE SOCIETY

Threatened Species Factsheet No. 17

GREEN TURTLE

What are they called?

Scientific: *Chelonia mydas*

Common English: Green Turtle

French: Tortue verte

Bislama: Grinfala totel

Vernacular: Uga Vanua (Maewo Sungwadaga dialect) amongst others.

A little bit about them:

Green Seaturtles are reptiles. They live in the sea but return to land to lay eggs.

Hatchlings (baby turtles) hatch on the beach, race to the ocean and swim to the deep sea where they feed on both tiny plants and animals.

The adults return to the coast and are the only herbivorous (plant-eating) seaturtle and feed on seagrass and algae. Green Turtles grow very slowly and can take 25-50 years before they can lay eggs. Their nesting beaches are often thousands of kilometers away from where they normally live. Females travel to nesting beaches to lay every 2-5 years.

Green turtles can be seen throughout Vanuatu.

What do they look like?

These are large turtles often over 1m long as adults and weigh up to 230kg. Their shells are usually a mix of brown, dark-green and grey patterns. The underside of their shells are light yellow and white. Their shells are smooth.

They have small dark-brown heads and serrated jaws for tearing seagrass. They have only 2 scales between their eyes which is useful to tell them apart from other turtles. Hatchlings are very dark in colour with white edges on their body and flippers.

Source: Big Blue Vanuatu

Did you know?

- They are named "Green" because of the colour of the fat found under their shell.
- Females lay 40-150 eggs per nest!
- They can hold their breath up to five hours underwater.

Green Turtles are classified as Endangered (EN) on the IUCN Red List.

Why are they threatened?

- Destruction of seagrass which is their habitat and food source.
- Being caught in fishing nets as bycatch or becoming stuck in old 'ghost' nets and drowning.
- Poaching of adults and eggs.
- Predation of hatchlings by birds, crabs and introduced species such as dogs and pigs.
- Accidently eating plastic rubbish kills adult turtles.
- Loss of nesting beaches

What do they do for us?

- They keep coastal and marine habitats, including seagrass beds healthy by cycling nutrients.
- Seagrass is especially important as a home for other marine organisms.
- This means there are healthier populations of fish and crustaceans which feed bigger organisms, including people!
- Create tourism opportunities as people like to see Green Turtles in their natural environment.

What can we do to help them?

- ✓ Use fishing gear that does not catch seaturtles by accident.
- ✓ Leave nesting turtles alone and do not remove their eggs.
- ✓ Improve seagrass health by reducing fertiliser and sediment runoff from coastal development, gardens and agriculture.
- ✓ Avoid using plastic wherever possible and put all rubbish in the bin so it doesn't end up in the ocean.

Want to know more?

- Read **the *Pacific Sea Turtle Education kit*** by SPREP
- Visit: www.iucnredlist.org

VESS
VANUATU ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE SOCIETY

CRITICAL ECOSYSTEM PARTNERSHIP FUND

IUCN