

TURTLE POACHING ON MOHÉLI, UNION OF THE COMOROS, A PARTICIPATORY ASSESSMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The island of Mohéli, Union of the Comoros (Figure 1), is recognized as one of the most important nesting sites for the endangered green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) in the Indian Ocean. Poaching of nesting females has already been identified as the most intense threat to this species in the Comoros.

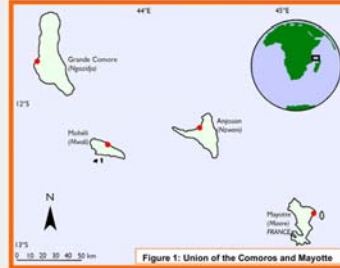


Figure 1: Union of the Comoros and Mayotte

METHODS

The objectives of this study were to elucidate realistic and sustainable solutions to turtle poaching on Mohéli through 1) threat assessment and 2) investigation of the socioeconomic factors that lead to poaching. Poachers, consumers, marine park rangers and law-enforcement officials were interviewed using semi-structured questionnaires.

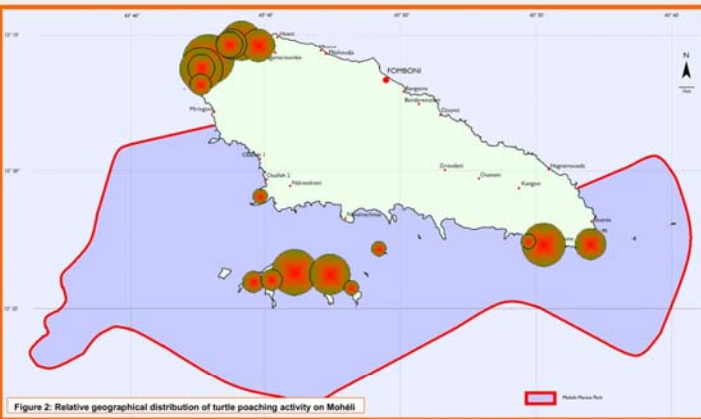


Figure 2: Relative geographical distribution of turtle poaching activity on Mohéli



Evidence of turtle poaching at the islets

HOW AND WHERE ARE TURTLES KILLED?

This study revealed that turtles were hunted at three primary locations around Mohéli, two within Mohéli Marine Park (PMM) and one outside (Figure 2): 1) the islets off the south coast; 2) the south east point, particularly at Hamavouna and 3) the north west region of Moimbasa. The majority (72%) of poachers killed female turtles before they laid, stating that the meat tasted better and that the eggs could easily be taken from the carcass. Poachers said that they ate the meat in secret, often on remote beaches or hidden in the forest.

WHO ARE THE TURTLE POACHERS AND WHY DO THEY DO IT?

Almost a third of turtle poachers were students, approximately a quarter were farmers and 14% were fishers (Figure 3). Turtles were killed because poachers needed food or money, succumbed to peer-pressure or because they believed that turtle meat was good for their health (Figure 4). Law-enforcement and awareness-raising have proved effective in convincing poachers to change their ways (Figure 5).

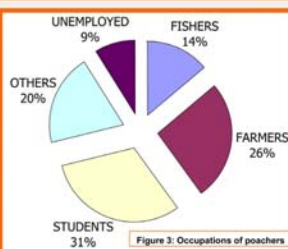


Figure 3: Occupations of poachers

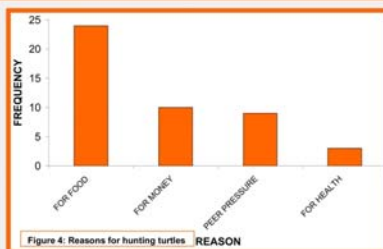


Figure 4: Reasons for hunting turtles

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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WHAT HAPPENS TO THE TURTLE MEAT?

- 26% of poachers sell the meat and 9% sell the eggs, so the majority is for personal use.
- The meat is sold at 125-250 FC / kg (US\$0.35-0.70 / kg)
- The most important market for turtle meat is located at the capital, Fomboni.

WHY HAVE POACHERS STOPPED KILLING TURTLES?

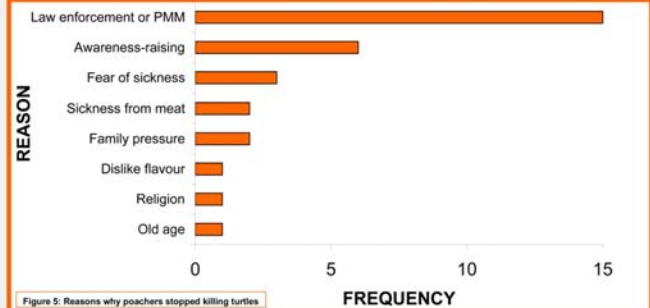


Figure 5: Reasons why poachers stopped killing turtles

ARE LAWS BEING EFFECTIVELY ENFORCED?

- 31% of poachers have been caught in the past.
- 63% of poachers believe that village ecoguards are an obstacle.
- 89% of poachers believe that hunting has become more difficult since the creation of Mohéli Marine Park.

RECOMMENDATIONS (FROM THE POACHERS THEMSELVES!)

- Awareness-raising and education 37%
- Beach surveillance 29%
- More ecoguards 9%
- Strengthening of village associations 9%
- Reduction of poverty and unemployment 9%
- Reinforcement of the justice system 7%



Turtle awareness-raising event at Hoani



A turtle that escaped the poachers

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was carried out by C3 in collaboration with Mohéli Marine Park (Parc Marin de Mohéli PMM) and Hoani Uni pour la Protection de l'Environnement (HUPPE) and was funded by the BP Conservation Leadership Programme. Mouzidalifa Issouf Bounou is grateful to the BP Conservation Leadership Programme and WIOMSA for providing a travel grant to enable his attendance at this symposium.

