

# WHAT CAN WE DO TO PROTECT THEM?

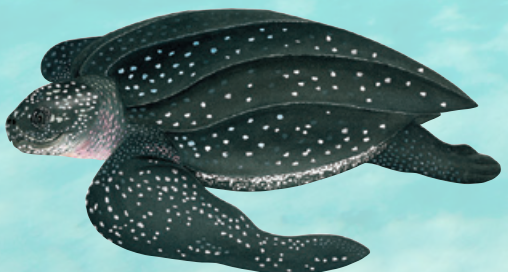
As all marine turtle species face serious threats to their survival and some species are in danger of extinction, in Vanuatu waters, turtles are now fully protected.

It is very important that Ni-Vanuatu respect the regulations and do not disturb turtle nests or take turtle eggs and, once again, responsible tourists can assist by NOT purchasing turtle products.



Hawksbill turtle  
Illustration: Rachel O'Shea, ©SPC

Tourists that purchase turtle products (generally shell ornaments, jewellery) in Vanuatu unintentionally support illegal harvesters of these species that play an important role in Vanuatu's ecosystem and culture. Eliminating the market by refraining from purchasing these products will help to protect these species and improve the biodiversity of Vanuatu's marine environment.



Leatherback turtle  
Illustration: Rachel O'Shea, ©SPC

## Vanuatu Fisheries Regulations state that:

A person must not take, harm, have in his or her possession, sell or purchase any green snail during the period starting on 1 October 2005 and ending on 1 October 2020.

A person must not take, harm, have in his or her possession, sell or purchase any trumpet shell that is less than 20 centimetres in length when measured along the outside of the shell from one end to the other; and during the period starting on 1 January 2009 to 1 January 2019.

A person must not; take, kill, have in his or her possession, export, sell or purchase any leatherback, hawksbill or green turtle or interfere with or disturb in any way a turtle nest or any turtle that is in the process of preparing to nest or laying eggs.



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# SLOW AND STEADY NOT WINNING THE RACE

The Vanuatu archipelago is one of the most beautiful places in the Pacific. Its warm coastal waters are not only a visitor attraction, but a source of food and livelihood that Ni-Vanuatu people depend on. Unfortunately, some marine species are very vulnerable to over-fishing. The Vanuatu Department of Fisheries has introduced regulations to protect some of these marine animals, and the support of visitors to Vanuatu is needed to eliminate the market for these endangered species.

# SEA TURTLES

## BIOLOGY

It takes 20 to 50 years for turtles to reach sexual maturity. In Vanuatu, female turtles lay eggs on the beach from September to January each year. After hatching from the nest, baby turtles face an uphill battle for survival due to the numerous natural predators: birds and crabs eat them when they are still on the beach, while sharks and fish prey on them when they reach the ocean. Out of 100 eggs laid, only one or two will become adult turtles.

Sea turtles come back to the place where they were born to lay their eggs. Therefore, turtles born in Vanuatu will come back to Vanuatu even after very long journeys to distant waters. If protected, they will continue to be a part of Vanuatu's amazing marine ecosystem that is a key attraction for many tourists.



Green turtle  
Illustration: Rachel O'Shea, ©SPC

## STATUS AND THREATS

Fishers and scientists around the world have noticed a dramatic decrease in numbers of sea turtles, with some species considered to be in danger of extinction.

Aside from natural predators, turtle eggs and turtles are at risk from human activities and introduced pests, such as dogs and cats, which further contribute to their risk of extinction.



# GREEN SNAIL & TRUMPET SHELL

Green snail and trumpet shell were once common in Vanuatu and were regularly found on reefs.

## BIOLOGY

Green snails (*Turbo marmoratus*) graze on marine plants that help to keep coral reefs clean and healthy. The green snail grows slowly and is only able to reproduce at around four years of age. It has a thick heavy shell and is harvested for its meat and, once polished, for its beautiful pearly white and green shell, which makes an attractive, but unsustainable ornamental souvenir.

The trumpet shell (*Charonia tritonis*) is a carnivorous shellfish and the largest marine snail in Vanuatu. It provides significant benefit to the reef as it is one of the rare predators of the destructive crown-of-thorns starfish (*Acanthaster planci*), which feeds on live coral and can destroy large areas of reef. In areas where the trumpet shell population is healthy, there are few outbreaks of crown-of-thorns starfish.



Trumpet shell  
Illustration: Hazel Adams, ©SPC

## USE AND STATUS

Green snails and trumpet shells are collected by locals for their meat and their shells which are commonly sold to visitors to Vanuatu. The trumpet shell is also used as a traditional musical instrument.

During surveys made on Vanuatu's reefs over the last decade, green snail and trumpet shells were completely absent in some areas and were sighted in very small numbers in other areas.



Green snail  
Illustration: Hazel Adams, ©SPC

## WHAT CAN WE DO TO PROTECT THEM?

A decision was made by the Vanuatu Fisheries Department to ban collection and sale of these species until 2020 to give the remaining populations sufficient time to reproduce and rebuild healthy populations.

Tourists can assist Vanuatu's green snail and trumpet shell populations to recover by NOT purchasing ornaments and souvenirs made out of their shells. This will reduce the demand for these animals and the incentive for fishers to harvest more than they need to support subsistence living.

