

Sea Turtle Exploitation in the Name of Conservation in Bali

By ProFauna Indonesia
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Bali and Island and the sea turtles are bond to each other. From the 1970's to 1990's, Bali was notorious as the hub of green turtles slaughter. ProFauna's report in 1999 uncovered the fact that there were 27,000 sea turtles slaughtered each year in Bali for bushmeat, either for religious or cultural rituals.

As a result of the great confiscation operations on sea turtles which were done by the police and government, a number of sea turtle traders were arrested and more important, sea turtle trade in Bali fell to 80% in 2002. Even though it has been decreasing sharply, sea turtles trade in Bali still happens in discreet manners.

Sea turtle protection campaign in Bali has been conducted since 2000 to encourage the marine animals conservation. One of which is by engaging the Lifeguards of Kuta beach, Bali. Since 2002, the beach guards have been working together with ProFauna and the Government (Forestry Department, under which wild animals are dealt) to rescue ashore sea turtles in Kuta beach. The rescue program includes sea turtle eggs relocation, hatchlings release, and awareness education for Kuta beach visitors. Sea turtles program now becomes a good attraction for tourism in Kuta beach, Bali.

Sea turtle hatchlings release is mainly for sea turtles conservation. Any one helps the release is not charged. After the eggs hatch, the baby sea turtles are immediately released into the sea, instead of holding them longer in the relocation ponds to attract visitors.

Unfortunately, some sea turtle conservation organizations in Bali tend to take advantage economically rather than sustainably. In July 2008, ProFauna visited the locations that kept sea turtles and found out that there were 5 places allegedly illegal.

1. 'Pulau Penyu' (Sea turtles Island), Tanjung Benoa region



There are five sea turtles center open for tourists. Each center owns about 20 sea turtles. It means that there are 100 sea turtles in *Pulau Penyu* (Sea turtles Island). Most of them, about 95% are green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*). According to a tour guide, once in three months, the sea turtles are replaced with the new ones. The nests are located by the sea and some are in the land. Each relocation nest is measuring 5 X 20 meters.

Tourist can take photos of themselves with the sea turtles. They are allowed to ride on the back of adult turtles or carry the smaller ones. This place is visited by many tourists.

Pulau Penyu is not only keeping sea turtles but also other wildlife species: Crested-serpent eagle (*Spilornis cheela*); the Black eagle (*Ictinaetus malayensis*); Malayan porcupine (*Hystrix brachyura*); kalong (*Pteropus edulis*); monitor lizard (*Varanus salvator*); and long tailed monkey (*Macaca fascicularis*). All of the wild animals are kept in narrow enclosures.



To get to the Sea turtle Island a tourist can rent a motor boat for 150,000 IDR (15 USD), including entrance ticket and a tour guide. There is a donation box near the relocation nest.



Souvenirs made from hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) shell are sold in the Island. Bracelets, necklaces, combs, and a whole shell of the poor hawksbill turtle are found there. More than 150 items are sold for each counter. A bracelet can fetch to 75,000 IDR (7,5 USD).

In fact, the sea turtle tourism activity doesn't have any license from the Forestry Department.

2. Turtle Center, Serangan Region



The owner of the center is I Wayan Raga, a former sea turtle trader. There are 10 adult green turtles. The marine animals are kept in a cemented pond measuring 5 X 20 meters. The place looks messy and no visitor. Some of the animals look hungry (when the keeper fed them with seaweeds, the turtles ate greedily).



It's free to see the sea turtles in this Turtle Center. The owner use the animals to attract tourist to buy the Balinese handicrafts he sells in the same location. During the visit, ProFauna didn't find any souvenirs made from hawksbill turtle shell. Similar to Turtle Island, Turtle center doesn't own any license from the Forestry Department to keep the protected sea turtles.

3. **'Bumbu Bali' and 'Rumah Bali', Nusa Dua Region**

'Bumbu Bali' is a restaurant serving traditional Balinese menu. "Rumah Bali is a hotel that serves traditional cooking learning program for tourists. Both of them are under the same management.

There are two small boxes (measuring 40 X 30 cm) containing about 30 sea turtle hatchlings. The boxes are placed near the dining tables inside the restaurant. The sea turtle eggs are kept 200 meters from 'Bumbu Bali' restaurant. During ProFauna's visit, there are four styrofoam boxes measuring 40 X 30 cm containing sea turtle eggs. The boxes are placed next to the parking lot of 'Rumah Bali'.

According to one of Bumbu Bali's staffs, the sea turtle eggs are from Jimbaran region. If they hatch, the hatchlings are released in Nusa Dua beach. Visitors who want to release the hatchlings are expected to give donation, the amount is not mentioned.

'Bumbu Bali' and 'Rumah Bali' doesn't have a license to raise hatchlings and keep sea turtle eggs. On 28 November 2007, the Forestry Department officers confiscated 436 sea turtle egss in 'Rumah Bali' and six olive ridleys (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) in 'Bumbu Bali'. Despite of the confiscation operation, 'Bumbu Bali' still keeps sea turtles ilegally.

4. **Reef Seen, Pemuteran Region**

'Reef Seen' is adalah a cottage in Pemuteran beach. There are five relocation ponds measuring 2,5 X 2,5 meters. Next to the ponds is a hatchery location.

According to one of 'Reef Seen' staffs, the sea turtle eggs are from the fishermen, 3,000 IDR (30 cents USD) each. The eggs are collected by the fishermen from the beach near 'Matahari' Hotel, Pemuteran region Bali. If a tourist want to release a hatchling, he must pay 100.000 IDR (10 USD) to compensate the feeding cost. The place doesn't have a license too tokeep the sea turtle.



5. Toya Pakeh, Nusa Penida Island

The place keeps two hawksbill turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) in a fresh-water pond near Quiksilver facilities in Toya Pakeh region, Nusa Penida, Bali. At this tourism place, visitors can take photo of themselves with the sea turtles by lifting the animals from the ponds.

According to a staff, the place previously kept eight sea turtles, including green turtles. They got the sea turtles from the waters near the facilities.

What is Wrong?

There are some strong arguments why the tourism places in Bali that keep sea turtles are wrong. They are:

- **Violates the Wildlife Law**

All sea turtle species in Indonesia are protected by the 1990 Wildlife Law. According to the 1990 wildlife law regarding Natural Resources and Ecosystem Conservations, to trade or keep protected species (including body parts: eggs and shells) are prohibited. Offenders will get a maximum of 5-year in jail and 100 millions IDR (10,000 USD) in fines.

Among the seven locations visited by ProFauna, all of them do not have the license from the Forestry Minister to keep the sea turtles or the eggs. Government Regulation no 8 in 1999 clearly states that the utilization of protected species (sea turtle) for rearing, breeding, and research must be licensed by the Forestry Minister.

‘Pulau Penyu’ (Sea turtle Island) in Tanjung Benoa region, is an example of wildlife law violation. There are not only about 100 sea turtles kept but also souvenirs made from hawksbill

turtle shell sold. The illegal trade happens openly. This violates the law No. 5/1990 mentioning that trade of protected species and their parts are prohibited.

- **Triggering Sea Turtles Illegal Poaching**

Sea turtles kept in tourism places can trigger the illegal poaching of the marine animals. There are no successful sea turtles breeding organization in Indonesia. ProFauna believes that the adult sea turtles kept in those locations are taken from the wild. Poaching from the wild for commercial purpose is prohibited and a crime.

Buying sea turtle eggs from fishermen is illegal too. This will trigger the fishermen to poach the eggs because there is demand.

- **Sea Turtles Exploitation**

Sea turtles rearing in some tourism places, (not the natural habitat of sea turtle) is the same way with sea turtle exploitation in the name of conservation. The sea turtles are raised improperly. Worse, in Toya Pakeh region, the sea turtles are kept in fresh water ponds. The animals are also ‘forced’ to get photographed with the tourists and in ‘Pulau Penyu’, the tourists are suggested by the tour guide to ride on the poor animals’ backs.

According to sea turtle experts, hatchlings which recently hatch must be released into the sea immediately. Unfortunately, some tourism places do not release the hatchlings immediately, but wait until some tourists pay to release them.

- **Uneducative**

Sea turtle rearing in some tourism places can educate visitors in the wrong way. It can create a concept for the visitors that sea turtles belong to the animals that can be traded and kept by humans freely. Sea turtles rearing in hotel can trigger the same activity for other hotels. This can be dangerous for sea turtle conservation in the wild, because there will be more sea turtles poached in the wild to supply the tourism industry.

What can be done?

Keeping sea turtles in a hotel, restaurant for entertainment and commercial purpose, and poaching the marine animals from the wild are illegal. Poaching and trading sea turtles and their body parts are breaking the law too.

The only way to make sea turtles as tourism attraction is by letting them live freely in their natural habitats. Beaches where the sea turtles get shore to lay their eggs should be managed in sustainable manners, so the animals will come ashore comfortably. Taking out sea turtles out of their natural habitats and keep them in tourism places, like ‘Pulau Penyu’ will trigger the wild sea turtles poaching. In short, this is a sea turtle exploitation in the name of conservation.

UPDATE NEWS: Forestry police confiscated hundreds of sea turtles from Bumbu Bali and Reef Seen on 25 August 2008
