

Turtle Islands Heritage Protected Area

Written by

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The Turtle Islands Heritage Protected Area (TIHPA) is the first transboundary protected area in the world, and its area of coverage spans Malaysia and the Philippines. It is the major nesting ground of the green sea turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) and is the only remaining nesting rookery of green sea turtles in the ASEAN region. It is also the eleventh major nesting area of marine turtles in the world. Turtles lay hundreds of thousands of eggs in the TIHPA each year, with approximately more than 2,000 nesters. While the hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) also nests in the TIHPA, the majority nests in the Gulisaan Island, Malaysia. Biodiversity resources in the TIHPA include 34 avian species, fruit and field bats, and reptiles (snakes, green sea and hawksbill turtles, monitor lizards); 15 principal arborescent species; 24 to 27 genera of corals; 76 to 128 fish species; and 62 species of marine flora.

The TIHPA's mission is the conservation and management of marine turtles and other natural resources, taking into consideration the culture, traditions, needs and involvement of local communities, as well as national policies and laws of the respective countries, for the benefit of both present and future generations, and to make the TIHPA a model transborder conservation area.

A case in point for consideration is a Philippine law involving turtle egg collection in the Turtle Islands. The Philippines' Presidential Proclamation 171 of 26 August 1999 declared the entire municipality of the Turtle Islands as the Turtle Islands Wildlife Sanctuary (TIWS). Its management is under the Department of Environment and Natural Resources' (DENR) Protected Area Management Board, and chaired by the DENR Director for Region 9. This was followed by the passage of the Wildlife Resources Conservation and Protection Act of 2001 (Republic Act 9147).

Prior to the passage of the Wildlife Act, the collection of turtle eggs in designated islands of the Turtle Islands was regulated through a DENR permit system that allowed collection only during open season from April to December. Sixty per cent of turtle eggs produced in the TIWS, except in the Baguan Island (which accounts for more than 50 per cent of the total of all eggs laid), were collected for trade – the rest were conserved. After the passage of the Wildlife Act, the collection of sea turtles or any of its derivatives, including eggs, was prohibited. This resulted to conflicts among stakeholders, inasmuch as egg collection has been a source of livelihood accounting for 35 per cent of the overall income sources in the area .

A proposal for a phase-out of the collection of turtle eggs and phase-in of alternative livelihood projects in the TIWS, under a memorandum of agreement among stakeholders, has been finalized and is pending approval. The declaration of developmental and foraging habitats for marine turtles as Critical Habitats, pursuant to Republic Act 9147, is being proposed.

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The following are some of the TIHPA's areas of concern:

- High incidence of intrusion in the vicinity of the Taganak Island;
- Illegal fishing;
- Jump off point for smuggling; and
- Jump off point for illegal migrants from Sabah.

[See TIHPA Map](#)

Source:

ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity 2010. ASEAN Biodiversity Outlook, pp.116. Los Banos, Laguna, Philippines. 2010.