

## A Geographical Analysis of Identifying the Gaps in Conserving Sea Turtles by the Sea Turtle Conservation Centers in Kosgoda

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### **Abstract**

Sea turtle nesting beaches in the Western, South-Western, Southern and South-Eastern coastal belt, lined from Mount Lavana to Arugambe in Sri Lanka, is a fortune. All five types of sea turtles visit Kosgoda and Rekewa beaches in Sri Lanka for nesting. Five private conservation centers are being operated in Kosgoda alone. This study aims to analyze the major gaps in conserving sea turtles through the conservation centers. Data were collected in five different cases through field observations, semi-structured interviews, and discussions with the staff of all five centers and selected foreign volunteers serving in the centers. According to the findings, uncleaned water tanks were identified in three centers, which can create an unhealthy environment for the turtles and hatchels. In all five centers hatchels were pocketed in small water tanks during the peak seasons. In addition to that, in two centers, some turtles struggle with very low level of water. Further, biggest challenge faced by all centers is the lack of proper veterinary care and medications for sea turtles, hatchels and especially injured sea turtles. In some cases, when turtles are rescued, they need medical treatment for injuries caused by fishing nets, boat strikes, or diseases. However, these centers often do not have access to veterinarians or the necessary medications to treat these injuries and illnesses effectively. Moreover, it has been recognized that the centers are providing opportunities for tourists to release hatchels to the sea during the daytime aimed at some rupees, unfortunately birds catch these hatchels within some hours after release. Besides, in two centers, visitors are sometimes allowed to touch the turtles and hatchels for photos and personal interest, which is against conservation ethics and can cause infection and the possibility of falling on the floor is high. The Purchase of sea turtle eggs by the centers from egg collectors can encourage illegal poaching of eggs and in this regard, it is highly debatable. The findings underscore that uncleaned water tanks and low level of water in some tanks, the lack of proper medication, the lack of staff with specific knowledge, and importantly, it has been recognized that the centers' major driving force is profit based on ecotourism.

**Keywords:** sea turtles, hatchels, conservation centers and conservation gaps