

The official newsletter of the Marine Wildlife Watch of the Philippines

Marine Wildlife Watchlist

Issue No. 1 August/September 2011

WHAT'S INSIDE:

- The Beauty of Turtles
- The Harm in Swimming
with Dolphins
- Ceteceans and the
Risk They Face
- I Hate Shark's Fin Soup
- Laws are Useless for
the Marine Ecosystem



The Beauty of Sea Turtles

Everyday, hundreds of sea turtles are caught or killed to be sold. What people don't know is that killing turtles affects the marine ecosystem greatly. This article provides 5 reasons how sea turtles help the marine ecosystem and humans as well.



Sea turtles in the Philippines are becoming endangered because of humans. Human activities such as fishing are the main cause of deaths of sea turtles. If not, the population of sea turtles is declining also because of injuries or deaths from commercial fisheries. Sea turtles are also losing their homes; and because of climate change, sea turtles are losing lives. Also because humans fail to take care of the environment, sea turtles are dying. Because of the trash that people throw in bodies of water, sea turtles die and are at risk.

Here in the Philippines, a lot of fishermen catch sea turtles, which are sold to foreigners. Some even get the turtle meat while others get the shell of the turtle so that these can be sold as food or decorations. It is possible that most Filipinos do not know the importance of sea turtles. They also do not know for a fact that it takes years before a sea turtle can reproduce. Because of the lack of

"Because of the lack of knowledge about sea turtles, they are becoming endangered and are at the risk of becoming extinct"

knowledge, sea turtles are becoming endangered and are at the risk of becoming extinct.

Some resorts in the Philippines even claim that they are helping in the conservation of the marine ecosystem and sea turtles by taking care of turtles, then setting them free when they are mature enough; but this is not what they are supposed to do. Sea turtles should live in their natural habitat where they are capable of finding their own food. By being dependent on humans, sea turtles have a low rate of survival once they are set free into the sea. People should know the correct ways of taking care of sea turtles.

Sea turtles contribute to the marine ecosystem in a lot of ways. People may only see them as mere creatures living in the oceans; but they contribute in maintaining healthy marine ecosystems. The types of sea turtles in the Philippines are green sea turtles, leatherback sea turtles, loggerhead sea turtles, hawksbill sea turtles, and olive Ridley sea turtles.

The different sea turtles help the marine ecosystem in different ways:

1. Green Sea Turtles and Seagrass Beds

Green sea turtles are large species that eat seagrass. Whenever these Green sea turtles eat the seagrass, the nutrients of seagrass blades are maintained and productivity of seagrass beds are increased. Without the help of green sea turtles, seagrass beds overgrow and destroy currents. Another effect is that slime molds appear, which is bad for the marine ecosystem. With the help of Green sea turtles, the supply of nitrogen in seagrass roots. It is said that nitrogen affects the growth of plant and nutrients. With green sea turtles further decreasing, the food web is put in the line. As a result, humans will become affected since the amount of nutrients received by humans through consuming fish will become less.

2. Hawksbill Sea Turtles and Coral Reefs

Hawksbill sea turtles feed on different types of sponges found in marine wildlife. Feeding on these different types of sponges change the composition of species and the distribution of sponges. With the presence of different types of sponges, the existence of reef-building corals is put into danger because it competes with sponges to have space in the marine wildlife. Hawksbill sea turtles help lessen sponges and increase the possibility of production of corals, allowing them to grow. Although people might think that other marine species can also consume the different sponges, sponges contain chemical contents for its exterior that keep them from being eaten. Only Hawksbill sea turtles are capable of taking off the chemical exterior. Hawksbills serve as the instrument in weakening the amount of sponges present in the marine wildlife.

3. Leatherback Sea Turtles and Jellyfish

Leatherback sea turtles can swim in very long distances. On this note, this type of sea turtle gets its energy by eating jellyfish. Jellyfish can be considered to be parasites in the marine ecosystem, especially since it is now growing in large numbers because of the decrease of leatherback sea turtles. Whenever leatherback sea turtles feed on jellyfish, they lessen parasites in the marine ecosystem that feed on the different species of fish because jellyfish eat fish eggs. Without leatherback sea turtles, there is a possibility that big fish species will disappear because of more jellyfish. This affects not only the marine ecosystem, but humans as well because the amount of fish that they can catch becomes less and there is a possibility that these fish will someday be gone.

4. Loggerhead Sea Turtles and Ocean Floor Ecosystems

One distinct characteristic of loggerhead sea turtles is that they have jaws that are powerful enough to consume hard-shelled marine species (crustaceans). By consuming hard-shelled species, loggerhead sea turtles help tear the hard shells



into small parts or turn into forms of decay. Through this, there is an increase in the amount of nutrients spread in the marine ecosystem. Whenever loggerhead sea turtles glide through the bottom of the ocean to search for their meal, they leave trails behind, which positively affects the ocean floor ecosystems.

5. Sea Turtles and Fishes

Sea turtles carry around different nutrients whenever they carry barnacles, algae and other organisms. Different species of fish benefit from this because the barnacles, algae, and other organisms serve as the fishes' food. In return, the sea turtles also benefit from this. When fishes feed from the barnacles and other organisms sticking in the sea turtle's body, their shells become clean. Some species are said to receive all the nutrients that they need from the organisms found in the sea turtles' bodies. Sea turtles not only provide food to marine species, but it also provides food for species found in the shore. One example would be turtle eggs. These turtle eggs provide certain nutrients that land species need.

Sea turtles are very important not only to the marine ecosystem, but also to humans. They can affect the species of fish and also humans because they affect the amount of species that is consumed by humans. Without sea turtles, the marine ecosystem may deteriorate and will never be the same again.

The Harm in Swimming with Dolphins

A lot of people would grab the opportunity to swim with the dolphins if they get the chance; but what they don't know is that this activity can harm dolphins and endanger their lives.

Swimming with the dolphins sounds fun and amazing. People pay thousands of pesos to have an encounter with these creatures; what they don't know is that these kinds of activities kill a lot of wild dolphins. A lot of conservation groups are against these profit organizations because they prioritize money before the general well-being of the marine mammals.

One negative effect of this recreational activity with the dolphins is its growing popularity with the tourists. Because of this, there is a demand for dolphins especially the bottlenose ones. There are companies out there who would support the capture of these animals and pay huge sums of money for live ones. It doesn't mean that if the dolphins are alive the companies are already protecting these animals. Dolphins are meant to swim in the wild, not in swimming pools.

There are a lot of bad things that can happen when capturing a dolphin. When fishermen are lucky, they would be able to capture a live and uninjured dolphin, but most of the time dolphins are injured in a catch because they would fight the nets that would enclose around them. **"Most of us have misconceptions about swimming with the dolphins as a recreational activity that helps in conserving dolphins"** There are also times when the dolphins would drown because they were stuck in the net and were not able to go to the surface to breathe.

When the dolphin is captured, it will still have to go through a lengthy transportation period. A few of these animals die on the way to their new home because of the stress and the inability to adapt. When they arrive to their new homes, they have to adapt to captivity and to their new diet. In the ocean, they get to eat fresh live fish, but in captivity they are forced to eat dead fish. Sometimes when the dolphin cannot adapt to the new diet, it is forced fed by the caretakers until it accepts its new food.

Some dolphins are also forced to live in dirty pools because not all companies take good care of them, and these animals need high maintenance. The water of the pool has to be

changed continually because they release at least twenty pounds of dirt each day. Also, these dolphins will not get the proper exercise they need because no pool will be big enough for them to swim sixty miles a day at twenty-two miles per hour, and can dive for a thousand feet below surface.

A lot of people have misconceptions about swimming with the dolphins. Most of us think that this kind of recreational activity is



a project for conserving animals. We don't know that it is actually cruel for them to be held captive. If a dolphin is sick and is held captive until it's fully healed then it is understandable to keep them confined; however, once it is fully healed then it is expected that they should be returned to the wild.

This does not mean that people will never get to swim with the dolphins if all the dolphins are sent back to the oceans. There are still tours out there that provide swimming with the dolphins in the wild. One can see the dolphins in their natural habitat with their families. The chances of swimming with the dolphins in the wild may be smaller, but at least we are assured that there were no dolphins harmed for this kind of tourism.

Cetaceans and The Risk They Face

Hundreds and thousands of Cetaceans get stranded everyday because of human activities. If people don't change anytime soon, there may be no Cetacean left.

Marine Wildlife Watch of the Philippines advocate for the conservation of all marine animals; however one of the organization's focuses is the cetaceans. This group of animals includes the marine mammals such as the whales, dolphins, and porpoises. The cetaceans make up one-third of all marine animals in the world. All three kinds of animals have blowholes that let them breathe air; they constantly need to go to the surface for respiration purposes. Because of the necessity to go to the surface frequently, they are very susceptible to the fishermen's fish nets, and hunters who are waiting to kill them for their meat and fins; however the decline of these animals' population was during the 1970s to the 1990s when commercial whaling was not only legal but also widespread in all parts of the world.

Unfortunately, these marine mammals are not only vulnerable from human beings. They are also in danger with the pollution that we cause to their habitat. There are times when dolphins or porpoises mistake our trashes as food and would eat them; thus making them sick and would eventually lead them to death. Another problem of these cetaceans is being stranded on the shallow water of bodies of water near beaches. According to scientists, there are a lot of reasons why this phenomenon happens. Some of these include manmade disasters like oil spills, dynamite fishing, and pollution that can lead to different kinds of diseases and injuries, while most of the time the causes are natural like lack of food, injuries from other animals, natural diseases, underwater earthquakes, rough

seas, tidal fluctuations, disruption of magnetic fields that most cetaceans use for their navigation system, and etc.

Being stranded in shallow parts of the ocean is very common; however there are times when not only one whale or dolphin is stranded. Sometimes, hundreds of porpoises and dolphins are

"Cetaceans are in danger because of human activities such as dynamite fishing."

stranded in by the beach. When there are sightings of these cetaceans on the shallow part of the water, scientists do their best to navigate these animals back to

the deeper parts of the water. Nevertheless, from time to time, some of the pods cannot be saved. If these pods don't get to the deeper parts, they end up washed up on the beach dead. Hundred of these dead cetaceans would fill the beach and scientists would study what happened to these poor animals. There are ways though to prevent them from being washed – up. One of this was what I mentioned – to navigate them back to the deep water. These animals would not usually survive being stranded without human intervention. We just have to act quickly to save as many as possible. Also, when they are already very near the beach, they are not necessarily dead. Some can still be saved when humans treat them first before releasing them back to the ocean.

Since there were numerous incidents of these animals being stranded, WWF and the marine Wildlife Watch of the Philippines gave a seminar and training to the places where these animals are prone to be washed-up or stranded. Scientists and veterinarians gave tips to the people on what to do when these animals are trapped in the shallow waters. This way when another occurrence like this happens again, at least the volunteers will be more efficient in handling the problem thus can save more animals and avoid casualties.



I Hate Shark's Fin Soup

Do you love eating shark's fin soup? Do you think it's delicious? This article will discuss reasons why you should hate eating shark's fin soup.

On July 2011, a petition was made to stop serving shark's fin soup. People don't want to listen and keep on eating shark's fin soup because they think that they aren't being harmed and for them, they're only enjoying a delicious meal. Here in the Philippines, shark's fin soup is very popular especially among Chinese restaurants. Sure, they may profit from serving shark's fin soup, but what they don't know is that serving shark meat affects people and the environment in many ways than one.

The following are the top three reasons why you should hate shark's fin soup:

1. Bad for your health. What most people don't know is that sharks contain the highest levels of toxic mercury making it very dangerous to eat shark's fin soup. A lot of organizations all over the world are trying to spread the advocacy to stop serving shark's fin soup that contains mercury. It is said that eating shark meat can cause serious damage to the nervous system and male sterility.

2. Bad for the environment. It takes a lot of years for a shark to mature and they only reproduce occasionally. Because of the growing demand for shark meat, around 70-100 million sharks are killed every year. This affects the environment because sharks play a big contribution in regulating the species in the marine ecosystem.

Without sharks, it is possible that the marine ecosystem will collapse, and it will affect us humans greatly because there is a chance that we won't be able to get

"Sharks contain the highest level of toxic mercury making it dangerous to eat shark's fin soup."

a supply of fish that we consume daily because of this. It was studied that even other marine species such as oysters and scallops are decreasing because of the decreasing number of sharks. People may think that sharks do not have any contribution to humans. They may only associate sharks with killings; in fact, sharks contribute in the marine ecosystems. Sharks can be considered to be man's friend because of the great contributions that they make.

3. Sharks are becoming more endangered year after year. Shark kills increase by more than 5% every year. Because of only a few regulations that prevent humans from capturing and killing sharks, a lot of shark fishing and finning is happening all over the world. It is also reported that around 110 species of sharks are now endangered. As we know, our marine ecosystem is rich with life, but with the growing amount of shark killings, it is possible that our marine ecosystem will soon run out of life. It was researched that once sharks are finned, fishermen throw their bodies back into the water where they are left



helpless to die.

Public awareness is one of the key factors in lessening the number of shark kill. People should start informing others about the effects of shark killing and that it can harm people's health too. People keep on serving shark's fin soup because of the growing demand for it. If people stop buying, then restaurants will stop serving them. One country has taken notice of the decreasing number of sharks in the marine ecosystem and they have done something to prevent more shark killings or finning in their country. Taiwan is the first country that ever to implement a ban on shark finning even if it is considered to be one of the top shark trading countries in the world. This is a big step for the country to promote the advocacy to stop shark killings.

There is still hope for the sharks. Stop the buying; stop the killing.

Laws are Useless for the Marine Ecosystem

Although there are laws against destruction of the marine ecosystem, we don't see any actions taken to implement these laws.



As they say, the world is made up of three – fourths water and one - fourth land. Our seas today are the home of almost 10 million marine species. Conservation and protection of these marine riches should be a top priority of the government. But today, not much has changed with regards to the laws that would safeguard these resources. With the lack of action coming from the Philippine government, many opportunistic individuals see this as a way for them to gain something at the expense of these marine resources. Recently, there have been reports that smuggling and overfishing have resulted to decline in these species which affects the ecosystem that these animals live in. Although these repercussions are not that evident at the moment, effects of such are experienced.

Laws have been passed to be able to control and regulate these actions. These laws are actually substantial enough to be able to protect and conserve our resources but the problem lies in the execution of these laws. Many factors affect the poor implementation of these policies. One is the lack of support from the government. Budget that comes from the government is not enough to cover the costs of patrolling and the equipments needed to halt these illegal poachers. Second

is that officials are not competent enough to be able to understand the current situations and the implications of the declining marine life in the Philippines.

The Philippines is truly rich in marine resources but the lack of interest by the government has put them in jeopardy. Recent

"The Philippines is rich in marine resources, but the lack of interest of the government has put them in jeopardy."

reports have stated that many foreign vessels are now patrolling the protected area of the Tubataha Reef, and when checks have been made; there

are dozens of stuffed endangered turtles and wild corals in their boats. Our country remains a hotspot for poachers because of our diverse marine wildlife and as citizens; we can do something to be able to stop these unjust acts. Simple actions such as not buying these animals and even reporting actions done by certain establishments that harm the marine resources of the country and other ecosystems can help stop these illegal poachers from continuing their actions.



Contact us:

Telephone No.: +632 812 3198

E-mail address: mwwphilippines@gmail.com

Address: 2108 Volta St. 1234 Makati, Philippines

Visit our Facebook page:

<http://www.facebook.com/marinewildlifewatchofthephilippines>

Creatives Team

Authors:

Sarah Mae S. Uy

Ria Gabrielle U. Lim

Photographer:

Ria Gabrielle U. Lim

Sarah Mae S. Uy

Newsletter Layout:

Sarah Mae S. Uy