

An Unusual Record : a Juvenile Green Turtle in Aberdeen West Typhoon Shelter

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Green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) sightings have occasionally been reported in the eastern and southern waters of Hong Kong and the adjacent Mainland China waters. In early December 2006, a local fisherman reported to the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department of his frequent sightings of a sea turtle in an unexpected setting - the Aberdeen West Typhoon Shelter.

The residents nearby told us that the green turtle was first seen in October 2006, mainly in the morning and late afternoon. It could be seen nearly everyday by the morning walkers at the Ap Lei Chau Waterfront Promenade. After spending some five months in the typhoon shelter, the green turtle was last seen in late February 2007.

Our site investigations showed that it was a juvenile green turtle (Fig. 28). It had an estimated carapace length of 50 cm, which appeared to be in good physical condition, without any marks or identifying tagging. The turtle surfaced regularly, breathing approximately three times per hour within our sight.



Fig 28. The coloration and carapace length showed that the green sea turtle was a juvenile.

Amidst the busy marine traffic, we noted the turtle's ability to be aware of the sea traffic and to escape moving vessels - as it only emerged when no vessel was approaching (Fig. 29). We believed the turtle was only a visitor to the typhoon shelter as the water area of only about 0.8 km² there would be too small for it. Tracking studies showed that juvenile green turtles could venture up to 5 to 6 km² a day (Seminoff & Jones, 2006; Makowski *et al.*, 2006).

Juvenile green turtles usually leave the pelagic nursery for the coastal habitats at a carapace length of about 30 - 40 cm or larger (Musick & Limpus 1997). Many then undertake further migration along the coastal



Fig 29. The juvenile green turtle was coming up to surface when no vessel was approaching.

habitats, in response to the variation of the supply of essential resources (Makowski *et al.*, 2006). Wanshan Qundao (萬山群島), the archipelago south of the Hong Kong Island, is known to be a foraging site for green turtles. We postulate that this unusual green turtle might have left its pelagic nursery and temporarily stayed in the typhoon shelter, a superficially unfavourable habitat, due to the abundance of food supply there from the nearby Aberdeen Wholesale Fish Market.

Information on juvenile sea turtles in Hong Kong is limited to their species diversity and general distribution, and is mainly derived from public's reports, casual observations and rehabilitation of injured individuals. Further studies on their diet, activities and distribution

hotspots should provide valuable information to help conserve them.

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