

Special Report: Fisherman Charged for Harvesting Three Sea Turtles

Report by Toledo Institute for Development & Environment

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In Belize, as well as across the globe, sea turtles face many threats; in fact, two out of three of the species found in Belize are considered "Endangered" by the World Conservation Union. The Belize fisheries laws on Sea turtles states; "No person shall interfere with any turtle nest, no person shall take any species of sea turtles, no person shall buy, sell or have in his possession any articles made of sea turtles."



Following a report that was made of a turtle head found in the road, today the 12th of December, 2011, members of the TIDE science team and an officer from the Belize Fisheries Department immediately went to the area to confirm the report. At the site, a total of three carcasses were found and identified, two Logger Head (*Caretta caretta*) and the other, a Green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*). The fishery officer questioned several individuals who lived in the vicinity of the carcasses. Locals reported that one day ago some men in a grey pickup truck had dumped the butchered sea turtle remains in the nearby bushes. Hearing this, the officer had suspicions about some local fishermen who lived nearby. A driveway where the fishermen lives confirmed that he could be the culprit as he had a turtle net drying out in his front yard. The Fisheries Department conducted a search at the house of the suspect and found three pounds of frozen sea turtle meat. The suspect's turtle net and the turtle meat were confiscated for use as evidence. As it was his first offence, the perpetrator has been charged BZ \$500, half the maximum penalty of BZ \$1000 provided for under Belize Fisheries Regulations.



TIDE staff recovered the carapaces of the three turtles. Unfortunately the head that was initially found upon first discovery was missing by the time a backup crew arrived. This was probably removed from the site by animals, as many vultures were initially found at the scene. TIDE staff took tissue samples from the carapaces for DNA analysis. Additionally, the carapace length and width of each carapace were measured and recorded. Measurements are below:

Species	Notch to Notch (cm)	Notch to tip (cm)	Width (cm)
Green Turtle	75.0	76.4	68.0
Loggerhead 1 (larger)	72.0	73.0	70.0
Loggerhead 2 (smaller)	61.0	62.4	56.6



1) Carapace and head at site of discovery; 2) Turtle head found in road; 3) TIDE staff measuring carapaces; 4) Left to right, Loggerhead 1, Loggerhead 2, and the larger Green Turtle carapaces; 5) TIDE staff putting carapace tissue sample in vial for DNA analysis; 6): Turtle head as found in situ upon first discovery.