

## Case Study Overview – Ghana

**Submitted by:** Department of Marine and Fisheries Sciences, University of Ghana

**Location:** Volta Region, Ghana

**Collaborators:** Phil Allman, Florida Gulf Coast University; Ghana Wildlife Division; Local Resorts/Hotels (Meet Me There, PinDrop); Ghana Turtle Research Project; Local Communities

**Threat:** Nesting turtles (olive ridleys and leatherbacks) are being killed while nesting and eaten or sold for meat

**Contributing factors:** Poverty, lack of education, lack of enforcement, lack of interest by law enforcement

**Description:** Fishing communities between the Volta River and Togo border (48 miles, 78 km) are killing sea turtles when they ascend the beach for nesting. They carry off the olive ridleys and slaughter the leatherbacks on the beach. They are killing approximately 100% of the turtles that come ashore, and are doing so before they have a chance to lay eggs. There is a Wildlife Division office in the area, but the law enforcement is weak, there is limited education, and lack of beach patrol to deter poachers. The killings are done in the open without any fear of being arrested because there is little interest by any entity to stop the activity. Poachers usually use a pickup truck on the beach to collect the turtles at the end of the night. The poaching is mainly for food and for sale (income). There is cause to believe (as gathered from some fishermen and traders) that some of the meat is sold in neighboring countries like Togo and Benin.

This area receives hundreds of nesting turtles during the nesting season (September – February) and has several resorts that could provide infrastructure for developing ecotourism centered around watching nesting leatherback sea turtles. But, the communities need to stop slaughtering the animals before tourists will be able to enjoy the experience of watching a nesting sea turtle.

Several different behavior change strategies may be needed to reach different audiences, including the Wildlife Division officers, community leaders and fishermen, and poachers (which we see as the highest priority).

### **Background:**

#### **Community/Target Audience**

There are 12 or more small fishing communities that are involved with poaching; of these, 3-5 are good targets for early adoption of a campaign. We have spoken to some fishermen and other community members that want to see the poaching stopped but they feel powerless since it is a legal matter. The poachers are aware it is illegal but they are also aware there is weak enforcement at protecting the animals. This beach is part of a Ramsar Site (wetland of international importance) and should, therefore, be given additional attention to wildlife protection.

Of the many possible audiences to target, we feel that targeting the poachers is most important, in particular the youth group. The age of this audience is between 25 and 40 years. They are fishermen. The majority of the people in the fishing community are involved in poaching. While the men go to the beach to harvest the animals, the women process the meat (smoking) for market and sell on the market. A significant contributing factor to high levels of poaching is poverty experienced by the local community.

### **Stakeholder Relationships**

We established a nesting survey team in this area during the 2021-22 nesting season due to reports of high poaching rates. We have permits and have worked with the Wildlife Division to help fund education programs in some of the communities.

### **Previous Work - Successes and Failures**

We provided some money to the Wildlife Division (the local law enforcement agency) in 2021 to conduct education programs in some of the communities, schools, and marketplaces in the region. Some awareness was also carried out using the local public awareness system and radio station. The Wildlife Division does not have a projector and generator and so education is by talking. These efforts have not been effective, however, because they were one-time visits in each community, and the poachers are already aware that what they are doing is against the law. Repeated engagement in each community is necessary.

Additionally, we acquired funding to purchase an ATV and now have a survey team actively patrolling 8 km of beach each night. It appears the only turtles that have nested and survived in the 2022-23 season are animals that our team got to before the poachers. Our team continues to witness many dead leatherbacks that are killed with machetes immediately after coming out of the water. We estimate the poaching rate to be close to 100% along the 78 km of beach, the only exception being the small stretch our team is able to survey. But our team has found freshly dead (or dying) leatherbacks that were killed in their patrol zone while they were sitting at another leatherback to protect it. The poachers are well organized with vehicles, phones, and machetes (cutlasses). There are many of them so they get to a turtle very quickly anywhere along the 78 km of beach. It is impossible for us to organize a team to cover the entire stretch of beach.

We believe we need a behavior change within the Wildlife Division and within the fishing communities. Poaching has been controlled elsewhere in Ghana through a combination of education, community engagement, and enforcement activities that have led to making arrests. Poaching in this area has been happening for a very long time under the eyes of the Wildlife Division. This will require a special strategy, one that we need help with.

Some of our ideas for how to reduce the poaching include a mix of (1) enforcement patrols and arresting some poachers (to serve as an example), (2) education and support from village leaders and fishermen to not accept poaching in their community, and (3) building the area as an ecotourism destination so communities can realize the value of living sea turtles over dead sea turtles.