

Case Study Overview - The Maldives

Submitted by: Atoll Marine Centre

Location: Maldives, Naifaru, Lhavyani Atoll

Collaborators: Naifaru Juvenile, a local non-profit

Threat: Locals poaching turtle nests to raise hatchlings as pets

Contributing factors: A desire for animal companionship yet a lack of domesticated animals on the islands; lack of law enforcement; fear of surrendering turtles due to laws

Description: The Atoll Marine Centre opened in 2012 in response to a longstanding cultural tradition of locals poaching turtle nests to raise hatchlings in their own homes, often in plastic bottles full of fresh water. Despite massive efforts in community outreach, school programming, and outreach to resorts and other islands, turtle nests on local uninhabited islands continue to be poached and the Atoll Marine Centre frequently hears stories from school children regarding their pet sea turtles. These hatchlings have no meaningful monetary value and are often given away for free. While laws now exist in the Maldives that prohibit the poaching of turtle nests that has not seemed to deter the local population. With this behavior change strategy, the Atoll Marine Centre is hoping to **1) stop the poaching of nests for pet hatchlings and 2) encourage the surrender of hatchlings that locals are keeping as pets.**

Background:

Target Audience

Naifaru is a very conservative Islamic community of around 8,000 people. The audience the Atoll Marine Centre would like to reach is 'older generations' including grandparents, parents, and fishermen- primarily men. These 'older generations' are motivated to continue poaching nests to keep this long standing tradition alive while also providing a sense of companionship in the form of pet hatchlings for their children and grandchildren. A critical barrier for this audience to change their behavior is the illegality yet lack of enforcement of poaching nests. This results in ease of poaching nests yet fear of surrendering hatchlings due to perceived punishments and fines.

Stakeholder Relationships

The Atoll Marine Centre is led by a well-respected community member, Mohamed Ahmed (Kanma). Mohamed founded a non-profit charity, Naifaru Juvenile, which provides engagement opportunities for the community to promote social, economic, and environmental health. Mohamed sits on the local council and the Atoll Marine Centre believes his leadership has led to strong relationships with the community. However, they have no established connections with the specific target audience. Additionally, awareness of the Atoll Marine Centre and what they do has diminished in the community. They have heard rumors that some locals believe they capture and amputate sea turtles in order to keep them at the Centre.

Previous Work- Successes and Failures

While the Atoll Marine Centre feels like they are having a positive impact with school children and the next generation, they have not made contact with the older generations, and they feel this is where the problem of long standing traditions lie. They have engaged the local community by hosting a marine school holiday program that runs every year, a bi-annual turtle festival open to the public, talks with local universities and colleges, beach clean ups, social media campaigns, and poster/craft sessions that

are advertised in the local shops and establishments. Some of these programs have been more successful than others, with several resulting in students surrendering pet hatchlings the day after a program. However, there have been times where students agree to bring in their pet hatchlings during the programs but then do not end up doing so. The Atoll Marine Centre believes the 'older generations' are acting as gatekeepers and the final decision-makers of whether nests are poached and hatchlings are kept as pets. This may be due to the students discussing it with their parents/grandparents and not getting permission to surrender the hatchlings, potentially due to fear of punishment or fines.