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**Attitudes Towards Turtle Conservation: An Island Wide Study in Sri Lanka**

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**Abstract**

Sri Lanka is visited by the five of the seven living sea turtle species recorded in the world. Sea turtle populations are declining, as is their ability to perform critical services in ocean ecosystems. Some of the obvious risks faced by marine turtles in Sri Lanka include incidental bycatch, illegal egg poaching, habitat change, destruction, and natural causes such as predation and erosion. Attitudes towards conservation of turtles and underlying motives for such attitudes is a lesser researched subject in the country. The present study therefore aims at assessing the attitudes of Sri Lankans towards conservation of sea turtles. A household survey was conducted using a pre-tested questionnaire adopting simple random sampling among 1084 households across the twenty-five districts of Sri Lanka through telephone and in-person interview from December 2021 to May 2022. The socioeconomic data of respondents, membership in a wild life or environmental organizations, recreational experience of turtles were also collected. A set of statements on sea turtles were presented for which the respondents indicated their preferences. Their willingness to contribute towards conservation was also recorded. The results of the study indicate that individuals from twenty-five districts had already been exposed to a wealth of knowledge regarding marine turtles and were well-informed. There were 603 individuals from coastal districts while 481 were from non-coastal districts. The average age was 45 years while number of respondents who had a membership of any environmental related wildlife organization was 164. Seventy four percent of the sample had seen live marine turtles; 37.6% of them had seen marine turtles in zoological gardens. Majority of respondents strongly agreed that (84% on average) sea turtles are worth protecting. Forty one percent of respondents agreed that it is everyone's duty to ensure the existence of plants and animals for future generations, showing that respondents had bequest motive for marine turtle conservation. Majority (63.3%) of respondents strongly agreed that sea turtles have the right to exist in the environment, showing that there is a strong existence motive for the conservation of sea turtles. The study emphasize the need to better utilize the strong motives of people for sea turtle conservation efforts in Sri Lanka that requires attention of legislators and decision-makers.

**Keywords:** Sea turtle, Attitudes, Conservation, Motives