

Interview with Jacques Fretey and Patrick Triplet for the publication of the Ramsar Sites and Marine Turtles report

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TEXT:

Interview with Jacques Fretey and Patrick Triplet, co-authors of the report on marine turtles

(Photo caption)

Hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) and coral reefs, Maldives

Credit: Andrey Armyagov / Shutterstock

At the moment, six of the eight living species of marine turtles are threatened or severely threatened. They are under increasing environmental pressure, mostly from humans.

In the opinion of experts Jacques Fretey and Patrick Triplet, a healthy environment is fundamental for turtles' protection. Thus, linking their research with the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar convention) was an obvious choice.

Experts

Jacques Fretey (JF)

Expert on marine turtles for the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Ministry of the Ecological Transition. Herpetologist (specialist in reptiles and amphibians), Jacques Fretey has studied the leatherback turtle's nesting in French Guiana, during his research for the National Museum of Natural History.

Patrick Triplet (PT)

Biologist, doctor in animal ecology, director of the Somme Bay national nature reserve, scientific expert for the Ramsar Convention. He has worked for the National Hunting and Wild Office.

What are the threats to marine turtles?

JF: When I started studying these species and trying to protect them, the threat came from village fishermen in tropical Caribbean countries where I worked, who killed turtles for their meat and shells, poaching their nests.

There are many more threats today, but they are also more insidious: beach erosion from deep-water ports, urbanization and coastal pollution. In future, global warming with rise in sea level will eliminate nesting beaches, feminization of populations due to temperature determining embryos sex, and regularity disruption in reproduction seasonality will also affect these populations, etc.

What is a Ramsar site?

PT: This is a wetland considered to be of international importance. So it is a recognition and not a binding measure as such. States are responsible for proper conservation of these wetlands. Wetlands play a critical role for biodiversity: they are home to over 100,000 known freshwater species. Vital for amphibians and breeding and migratory birds, they are under threat: 64% of the world's wetlands have disappeared since 1900.

The Ramsar Convention seeks to raise public interest in the subject of wetlands as a means of raising awareness of environmental issues in a more global way.

We have become aware of the importance of improving turtle habitats before seeking to protect them as such.

Jacques Fretey

What's next? What are the next steps in your work?

PT and JF: Our ambition is as follows:

- Encouraging states to list sites that we have suggested;
- Going into detail about the situation of marine turtle habitats in French Overseas Territories, and making recommendations;
- Helping States, including of course France, through our international experience in all oceans, to draft management plans for the Ramsar sites concerned.

What other actions can contribute to the protection of marine turtles?

PT: Conservation of marine turtles and their habitats must be a global cause and each state needs to provide the necessary means to achieve a good population level of different species. Hopefully, specialists and experts are mobilizing on a daily basis to raise public awareness and work towards the creation of new marine protected areas. Shouldn't means allocated to research / specialists and experts be increased to encourage our work and allow us to carry it out in the best possible conditions?

JF: Ratifying conventions, publishing national laws and drafting action plans for protecting marine turtles are not enough for real conservation of species. We need to limit construction of tourist facilities behind nesting beaches, strongly reduce coastal pollution, better monitor accidental captures by trawlers, improve the quality of life of resident coastal village populations and diversify their protein food sources. For our Overseas Territories and other Southern countries, it is necessary that young generations understand the interest of safeguarding biological diversity and in specific marine turtles ; if they want their children to keep on swimming with them in clear water or to see extraordinary scenery of a female nesting on a beach.

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