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REMINISCENCE OF TURTLES FROM A PAST CURATOR

E. Banks

INTRODUCTION

There is no more pleasant way of spending a week-end than to go by boat to the Turtle Islands of Sarawak where the turtles lay their eggs. They are not large islands but the waters are the bluest and the sands the most golden, all charmingly set in a circle of classic green coconut palms. As evening falls marvellous orange and purple-green sunsets appear, frigate birds on widespread wings pass over on their way to roost, a cool wind blows and the only sound is the brawl of the waves on the beach.

As darkness falls a turtle raises her head out of the water about forty yards out from the beach. Any sound or movement sends her down but if not frightened she may give a long hiss, as she expels air and then advance slowly towards the beach. When high tide is at nightfall, up to a hundred turtles used to join in for a short crawl from the waters edge to the fine, soft powdery sand beyond the reach of the highest tides. The going is slow, grandmother's steps, only the fore flippers are used, gripping the sand and hauling the heavy shell and body up the beach. After about four steps she lowers her head on the sand and takes a rest, as if in deep thought before taking the next series of steps. Once above the usual high water mark, the turtle starts to dig a large bomb crater, the fore flippers whisking the sand right and left and backwards. Having settled down at the bottom of this crater, she starts digging downwards with her almost elephant-like hind feet. With great skill these feet dig straight down, the bore hole about eighteen inches deep and six inches wide. The feet are withdrawn each time with a mass of sticky wet sand cupped in the soles of the feet and thrown backwards for the next ten minutes. Her time has now come and for the next ten minutes nothing can frighten the old lady. Down the bore hole go her eggs one by one, one hundred to one hundred and ten into the nest. The eggs are round and leathery, about the size of a ping-pong ball. Having at last finished the job, a great game takes place as she proceeds to cover up the nest. Her fore flippers are whirled right and left like the paddles on the old paddle steamers, sand and little stones fly in all directions until the bomb crater is full up and can no longer be seen.

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by

E. Banks

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The turtle then slowly makes her way back to the sea and I suppose just as she is giving a sigh of relief, up comes the male turtle intent on courtship. Anyway, after about a fortnight up comes the old lady again for another laying and does not come around again for another three years.

EL NIÑO AND THE TURTLES

For a hundred years the eggs of the Green Turtle *Chelonia mydas* have been collected on the Talang-Talang Islands off the coast of Sarawak.