

## Human Predation on Marine Turtles in the Archipelago of Cape Verde, Western Africa

IDOYA CABRERA, DANIEL CEJUDO, AND LUIS F. LÓPEZ-JURADO

*Departamento de Biología, Facultad de Ciencias del Mar, Universidad de Las Palmas (Spain)*

Deliberate take of marine turtles and their eggs occurs worldwide. Turtle meat and eggs may constitute a seasonal protein source in some developing countries. The shells, the stuffed bodies and other by-products are often destined for the tourist trade. This activity has been known in Cape Verde for a long time; fishermen catch turtles in the sea, though it is on the beaches where the number of captures is much higher.

The island of Boavista hosts an important population of *Caretta caretta* which, waiting for further studies, may represent one of the most significant populations in the Atlantic Ocean. It is essential to quantify the pressure exerted by the barely 4,000 inhabitants of Boavista on the sea turtle population before implementing a conservation strategy designed to reduce the loss of reproductive females.

### Methodology

Several interviews were held with local people at different islands of this archipelago over the last few years (1996-1998). The goals were to gauge the present intensity of captures, to know the different hunting techniques, and to evaluate the supposed decline of populations, using as an indicator the rough volume of captures during the last years. It is important to note that some information provided by islanders did not appear to be very reliable.

Simultaneously, there were beach surveys aimed at quantifying the number of slaughtered turtles, attending to the amount of remains onshore, and trying to observe hunting activity *in situ*.

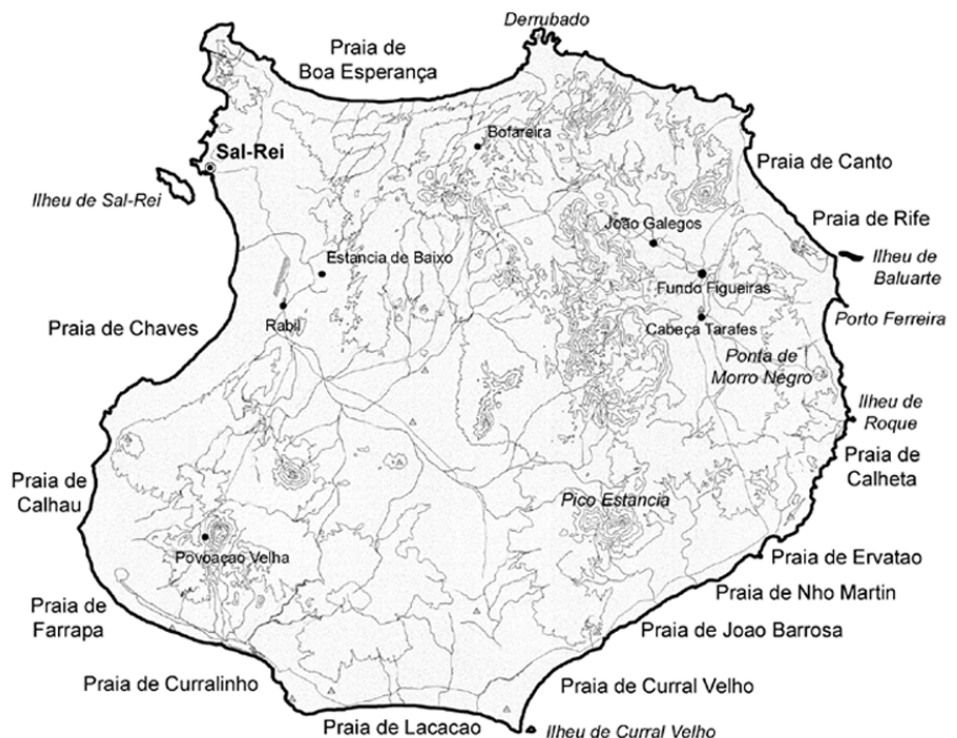
Additionally, local markets were searched for turtle meat and decorative items (carapaces, stuffed animals, etc.).

### Results and Discussion

The beaches closer to villages were likely intensively exploited in the past, simply because they were more accessible to people. Thus, on Boavista Island live individuals or, even, turtle remains are barely found on the beaches adjacent to human populations, though they are said to have been very abundant. On the beach of Chaves, near Rabil, remains are absent and, at present, only a few turtles appear to be nesting in this area. On the beaches of Calhau and Curralinho, near Povoação Velha, it occurs the same as mentioned above. Finally, on the beach of Bôa Esperança, near Sal-Rei and Bofareira, as well as on the beach of Canto, near three villages located on the northeastern shore, there still exists some reproductive activity, and sea turtle hunting and egg harvesting are not so intensive as at other points of the islands.

On the contrary, both nesting turtles and carcass remains are found in a relatively large number on the beaches distant from the villages located between the Ilheu of Baluarte and the Ilheu of Curral Velho (Fig. 1).

The over-exploitation of sea turtles on the most accessible beaches has likely led to the depletion of nearly all these nesting populations in the last decades. As a result of this, hunts have extended to more remote areas that still host an important number of specimens.



**Figure 1.** Map of Boavista showing the main beaches and villages.