OBJECTIVE 1: To describe an indigenous method for capturing sea turtles in nearshore waters.

The theme of cultural practices revealed several enlightening traditions. For instance, when a turtle was captured it was brought into Mog Mog where the chief would place a shell in the ground indicating where the turtle was captured and the shell was not to be disturbed. An entourage would then drive out to where the turtle had been captured and put the shell on a pedestal. In time, as people of Ulithi did not actively hunt and seek them out, they would go to look for turtles. This is most likely due to the fact that hawksbill turtles are endangered and are not observed as often as green turtles; there was obviously some measure of traditional conservation practices in place for this species simply because they were not actively sought out. Also, because of existing cultural traditions of hawksbill turtles and value that was attached to artwork made from their shell for community members, they were not made into souvenirs or sold to tourists as they are in other regions of Micronesia. As Jessy so eloquently put it: “We don’t give those to tourists, cause it don’t belong to the tourists.”

OBJECTIVE 2: To describe Micronesian cultural traditions relevant to sea turtles.

From this study we describe an indigenous method for capturing turtles: indigenous hand-capturing techniques learned in Ulithi, Yap, and combined methods learned in Yap for his work with the CNMI DLNR. These regions share similar turtle populations, though the Northern Mariana Islands is a Commonwealth of the United States. It is illegal for residents to capture and consume sea turtles under the Endangered Species Act. In 1998 an indigenous group in the Northern Mariana formally requested a limited take of turtles “for cultural and ceremonial purposes” before the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council (Elameto 1996). Since then the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration has worked towards providing grant funding and training to the CNMI’s sea turtle program to perform baseline near shore and nesting beach surveys that would estimate population size, sex classification, apatite composition, and genetic origins of CNMI turtle aggregations.

Recent estimates suggest a total nesting population in the CNMI of 15-20 adult green turtles and less than five adults observed during near shore surveys. On average, 20% of nesting turtles are poached every year and 87% of all turtle nesting sites are reported to have experienced poaching from shores (Leatherwood 1977). Although Ulithian culture is based on a matriarchal society where women hold power to lands and properties, when it comes to turtle conservation policies and management practices in Micronesia ( MQM q t p ) turtle conservation practices are still often tied to men. Women historically have been involved in turtle capture and parts were often distributed among the families and women were stretched along a far distance. Then they stayed in the house cause it was inappropriate for women family members to see their brothers or sons dancing in that al fashion. This dance is intriguing as it cuts across strict gender roles for women concerning capture of green turtles. Although Ulithian culture is based on a matriarchal society where women hold power to lands and properties, when it comes to
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