

Endangered turtles no longer turned into souvenirs

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Stuffed hawkbill turtle, turtle shells and shell items confiscated by authorities in the Dominican Republic. Credit: TRAFFIC North America/ Adrain Reuter

Critically endangered hawkbill turtles are no longer being sold as tourist souvenirs in the Dominican Republic after a powerful government campaign cracked down on shops illegally trading such items. More than 99 percent of these souvenirs have been withdrawn or confiscated the wildlife trade monitoring network TRAFFIC reports.

A 2006 survey carried out by TRAFFIC found more than 23,000 items made from hawkbill [turtles](#) for sale. A February revisit of the same

locations revealed a dramatic reduction with only 135 shell items.

The success has been achieved thanks to a widespread government-led action launched in November 2008. The Dominican Republic has encouraged the trade of alternative products such as cow horn or bone to present an alternative to shops trading with these turtles.

"We warmly congratulate the Government of the Dominican Republic on their decisive action that has virtually eliminated the blatant illegal souvenir trade in hawksbill turtle shells," said Adrian Reuter, TRAFFIC's Representative in Mexico. "This sets an important conservation example for the region, showing that there are solutions that benefit wildlife and people, especially local communities that rely on tourism."

Hawksbills are one of three [marine turtle species](#) that nest on beaches in the Dominican Republic. Over the last century, millions have been killed for the tortoiseshell markets of Europe, the United States and Asia. Today they are preyed upon by poachers mainly for their shells, which are made into souvenirs and sold to tourists, millions of whom visit the country, mostly from North America and Europe.

Hawksbills are classified by IUCN as Critically Endangered and facing an extremely high risk of [global extinction](#). They are listed in Appendix I of CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild [Fauna](#) and [Flora](#)) along with other marine turtles, which prohibits their international trade.

"With marine turtles around the world being threatened with extinction, we need to maximize every effort to save these species, not least because they are worth infinitely more alive as tourist attractions than dead," said Carlos Drews, WWF's regional co-ordinator for marine turtle conservation in Latin America and the Caribbean. "The good news from

the Dominican Republic is that it demonstrates to fellow nations that a real difference can be made to reduce illegal trade."

Source: World Wildlife Fund

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