

Marine Protected Areas are keeping turtles safe

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Marine Protected Areas are helping protect green turtles, according to a new study led by the University of Exeter. Credit: Peter Richardson, MCS.

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are providing sea turtles with an ideal habitat for foraging and may be keeping them safe from the threats of fishing. A study by an international team of scientists led by the University of Exeter, published today (Thursday 15 March), shows that 35 per cent of the world's green turtles are found within MPAs. This is much higher than would be expected as only a small proportion of shallow oceans are designated as MPAs.

MPAs are areas of ocean in which marine activities such as fishing are restricted. Regulated by governments and NGOs, in the tropics they are often rich in [seagrass](#) and algae, providing food for the turtles, whose

foraging may also help to maintain these habitats. There are different categories of MPAs, with the most strictly-protected being managed mainly for science.

The research team used data on the movements of 145 [green turtles](#) from 28 nesting sites, captured through extensive satellite tracking work by a collaborative team from ten countries. Their data shows that green turtles can travel thousands of miles from their breeding sites to their feeding grounds. 35 per cent of these were found to be foraging in MPAs. 21 per cent were found in MPAs that are most strictly protected and older MPAs were more likely to contain turtles.

Professor Brendan Godley of the University of Exeter's Centre for Ecology and Conservation said: "Our global overview revealed that [sea turtles](#) appear in [Marine Protected Areas](#) far more than would be expected by chance. There has been debate over the value of MPAs, but this research provides compelling evidence that they may be effective in providing safe foraging habitats for large [marine creatures](#), such as green turtles.

"The satellite tracking work that the University of Exeter has played such a lead role in developing allows us to assess the value of MPAs in a way that would never have previously been possible."

This study is published in the journal [Global Ecology and Biogeography](#). It was facilitated by SEATURTLE.org and the group is funded by NERC and Defra's Darwin Initiative. .

Fisheries Minister Richard Benyon welcomed the results of the research: "This study unlocks some of the secrets surrounding the life cycle of marine turtles, whose movements have long been a mystery. The results will mean we will better manage the oceans and protect turtle habitats which are key to helping them survive.

"This also shows the vital collaborative role Defra's Darwin Initiative plays in the cutting edge of conservation worldwide."

Provided by University of Exeter

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