

Call for 'citizen scientists' to help protect sea turtles

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'Citizen scientists' can help protect endangered green sea turtles by observing and gathering information about them, according to a PhD student from The University of Western Australia's Oceans Institute.

Turtles are in danger around the world. In some countries, turtles and their eggs are hunted for food. Pollution indirectly harms them and many die in [fishing nets](#). Development often causes habitat loss by eliminating nesting beaches and damaging their feeding grounds.

Julia Reisser - along with colleagues in Brazil - has recently published a study in the prestigious journal *Marine Biology* in which they show that we can still discover important information about [sea turtles](#) (*Chelonia*

mydas) just by looking at them.

"Several high-tech methods such as genetic analysis and satellite tracking are providing useful information regarding sea turtle ecology," Ms Reisser said. "However, observational approaches, extensively used by naturalists in early ecology, still have the potential to fill gaps in our marine ecological knowledge."

Her team's study quantified the influence of [environmental variables](#) on the distribution and behaviour of green sea turtles by using a combination of quantitative observational methods.

They identified shallow waters (0 - 5 meters) as a critical feeding habitat for juvenile [green turtles](#) and described how, where, and what these reptiles are feeding upon within the waters of a marine reserve, Arvoredo, in southern Brazil.

"Underwater observations such as the ones described in this study could be incorporated to other research programs such Citizen Science projects that involve diving activities," Ms Reisser said.

"It could help deliver better management plans to protect [sea turtle populations](#)."

In their study, Ms Reisser's team recorded a variety of interesting turtle behaviours and food preferences, some of it gathered during more than 1500 scuba and snorkelling diving sessions.

Like other sea turtles, green turtles - which live in tropical and sub-tropical oceans - migrate long distances between feeding grounds and hatching beaches. Females crawl out on beaches, dig nests and lay eggs during the night. Later, hatchlings emerge and scramble into the water. Their in-water behaviour and distribution are still mysterious to scientists

and some call turtles' first years of life "the lost years" due to difficulties tracking their movements.

Provided by University of Western Australia

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