



#231
21 April 2023

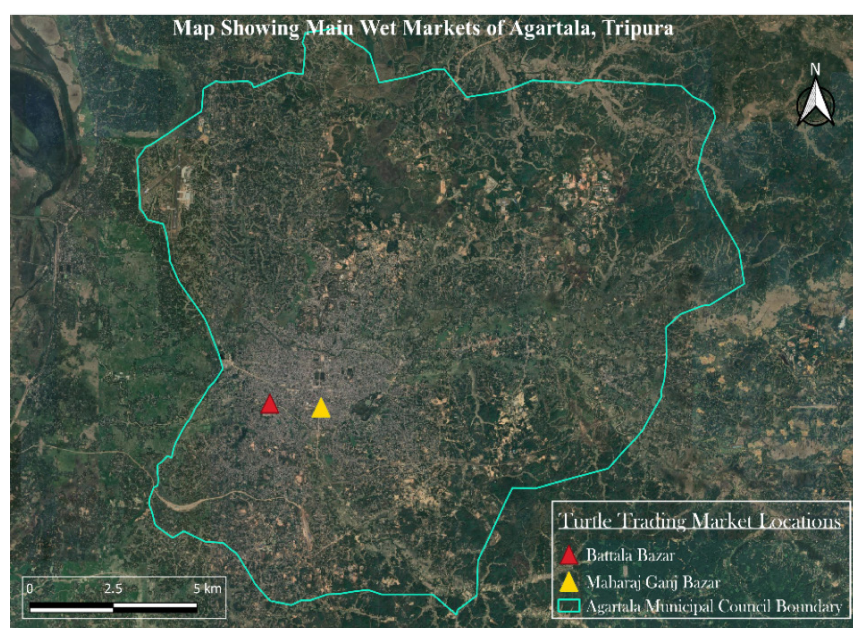
People's perception on turtle meat consumption in Tripura

The northeastern part of India has been perceived as a significant region for conservation of freshwater turtles and tortoises. It is also known as the region of high turtle diversity.

A study on people's perception on consumption of turtle meat was carried out in Agartala, which is the state capital of Tripura, India. There are two main markets in Agartala, namely, Maharaj Ganj Bazar and Battala Bazar, where turtles such as the Indian Peacock Softshell Turtle *Nilssonia hurum* locally known as 'Kashram' in Kokborok River Terrapin *Batagur baska* locally known as 'Kathar', Indian Softshell Turtle *Nilssonia gangetica* locally known as 'Ganga Kachim', all belong to the Schedule 1 species listed under the Indian Wildlife

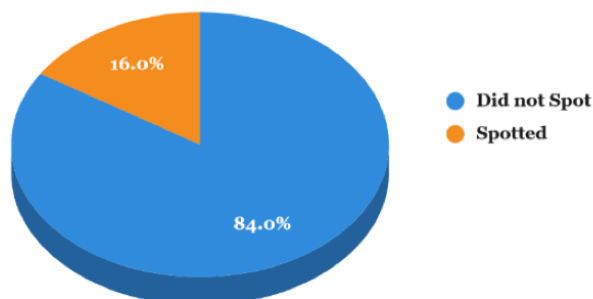
Protection Act, 1972. Black Softshell Turtle *Nilssonia nigricans* a.k.a Bostami Kachim/ Bostami Turtle locally known as 'Kala Kachim', were openly cut and sold until the trade ban was put in place in 2017. It is well known in the state that the turtles that are consumed are mainly brought via Bangladesh.

It is found in this study, that people are not willing to stop consuming turtle meat despite their positive response towards turtle conservation and being aware of the decline in turtle populations due to consumption of turtles. From the present observations, it is found that the ban has merely reduced their consumption

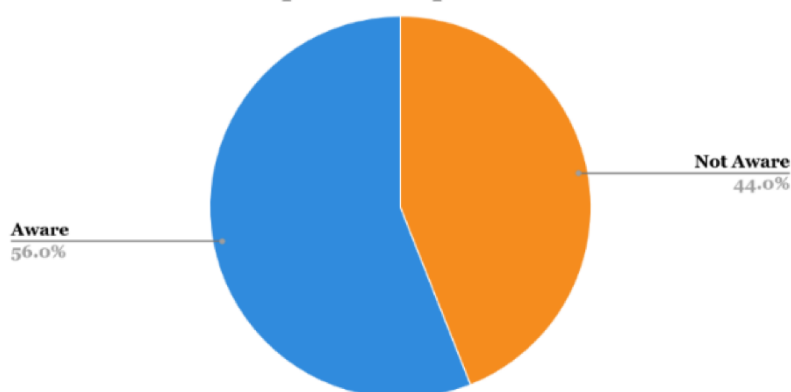


Map showing two main wet markets of Agartala, Tripura.

Percentage of respondents who have spotted turtles in the market after the ban



Percentage of people who are aware of turtles being a protected species



Percentage of respondents who have spotted turtles in the market after the ban and who are aware of their protection status.

ability, not stopped, despite being illegal. The continued presence of illegal trade suggests that the demand for turtle meat in the state is high.

Sixteen percent of the respondents have seen turtles being sold openly in the markets after the ban. Forty-four percent of the

respondents of this study remained unaware that turtle species are protected by law, i.e., under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972 which states that the species are granted protection from poaching, killing, trading etc. Poaching or possession of any protected wildlife species and the illegal trade of their body

parts is a criminal offence leading to imprisonment for between three to seven years.

Twenty percent of the respondents were not aware of the ban. Eighty four percent of the respondents said that it is important to conserve turtles.

Thirty-four percent of the respondents are not aware that the turtle populations are declining. Twenty-six percent of the respondents do not think that consuming turtles have any sort of effect on the environment, while 22% are unsure of such effects.

Sixty-six percent of the consumers will continue to consume turtle meat if the ban is lifted. Sixty percent of the respondents said they will not give up eating turtle meat even if the ban is in place.

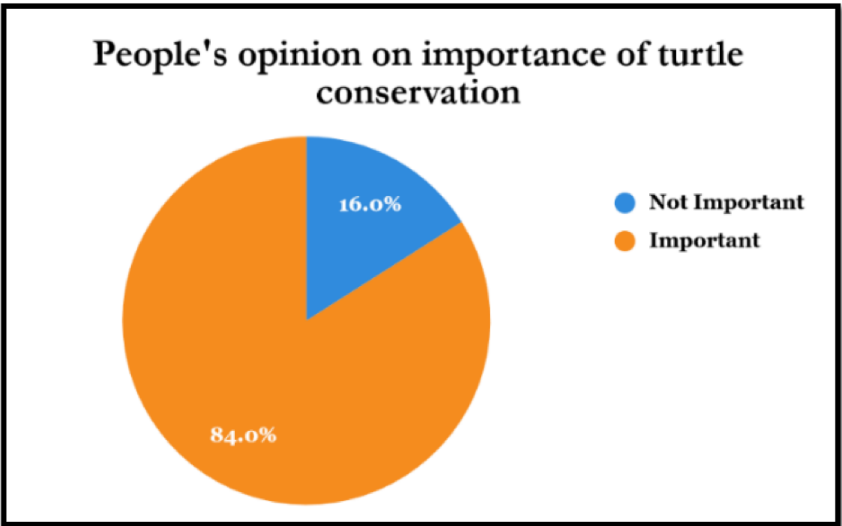
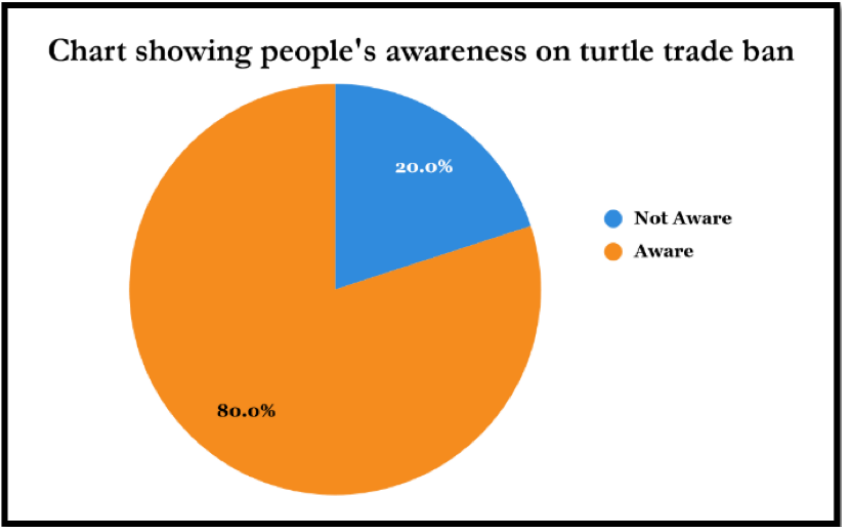
Forty-two percent of the respondents (consumers) have turtle meat often. Ninety-six percent of the total respondents who consume turtle meat feel that the price of the turtle meat is not reasonable. And 79% of the total respondents who consume turtle meat say that



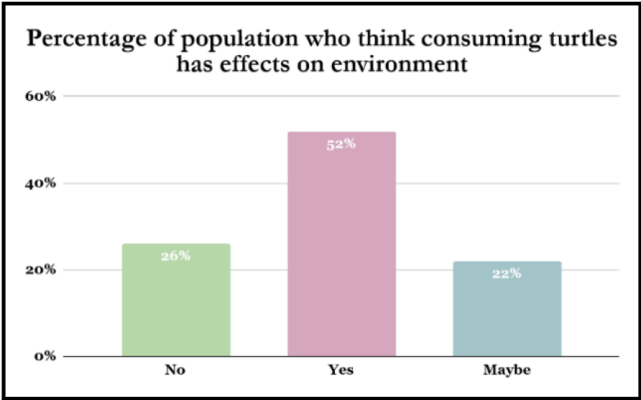
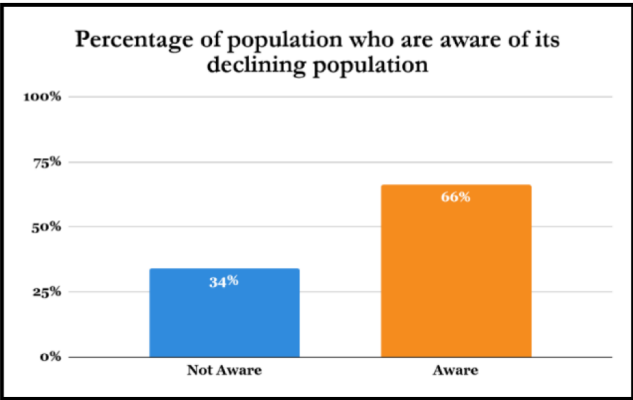
the price of the turtle meat affects their consumption.

There are number of factors that point towards why people still continue to consume turtle meat. When asked why they still consume it, the common replies included, “we have been eating for generations”, and, “It is tasty”. Many consume freshwater turtles as a protein source and for its taste. The demand for consumption of turtle meat in specific places is a huge threat for the freshwater turtles (Rakotonirina & Cooke 1994). Despite the ban, people have continued to have access to the meat even though in limited numbers.

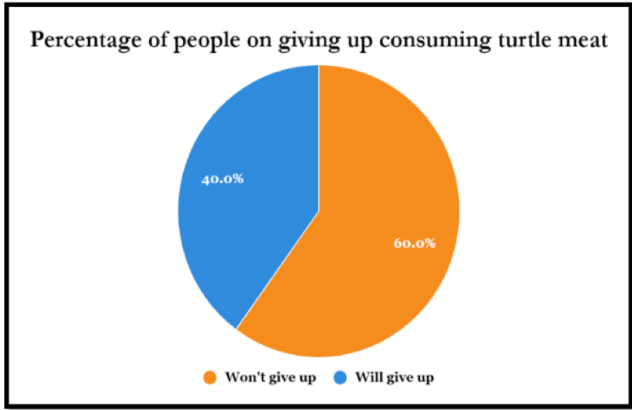
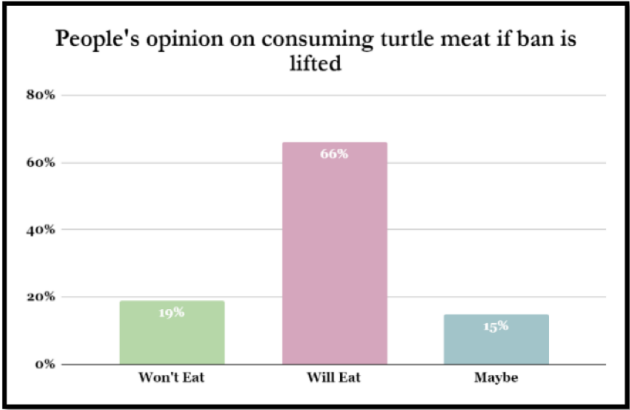
The lack of information about turtle protection status by law, decreasing population and



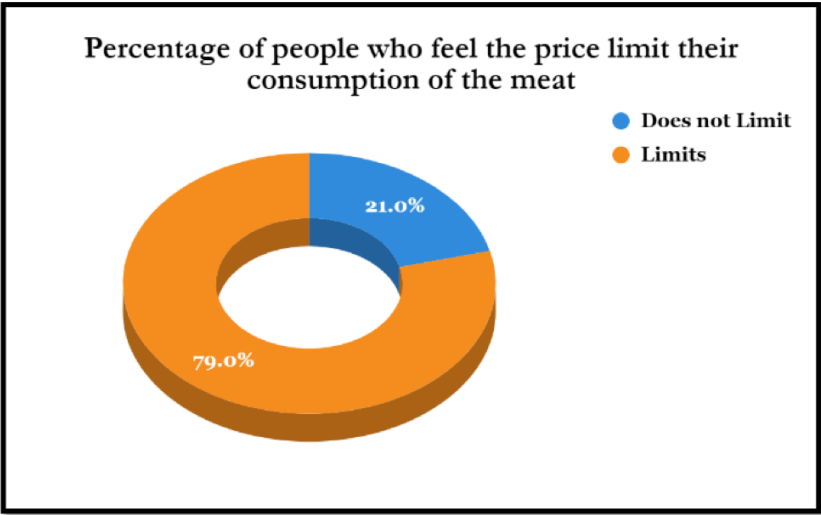
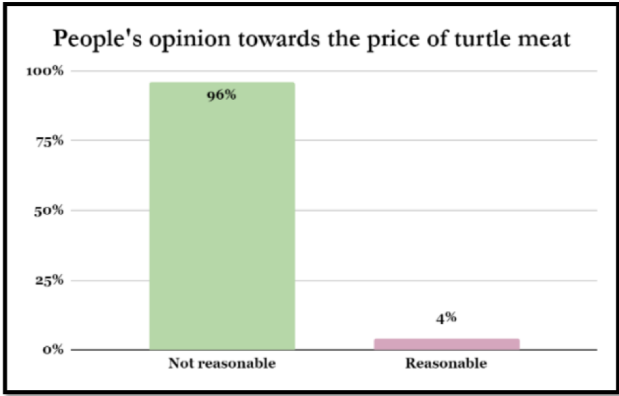
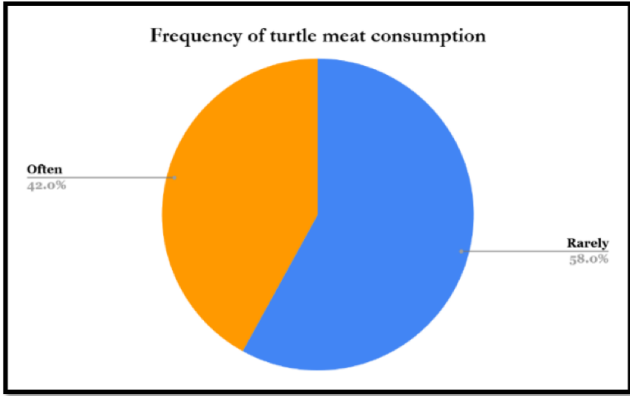
Pie chart showing people’s awareness on turtle trade ban and their opinion on conserving turtles.



Percentage of population’s awareness on the declining turtle population and the effect of consuming turtles.



Respondent’s opinion on consuming turtle meat if ban is lifted and whether they will give up on eating turtle meat.



Turtle meat consumption frequency chart, people’s opinion towards the high prices of turtle meat and its effect.



conservation initiatives need to be addressed. The illegal consumption of turtles in large numbers for its taste is a major threat to these animals and is a major cause for their decline in the wild overall. Its high demand directly puts pressure on the turtles thereby ultimately decreasing their population size alongside damaging the ecosystems they are present in.

Hence, to bring about changes in the consumer attitudes towards these reptilians, gradual but continuous education, awareness, and sensitisation on this subject are a must. The responses in this study have shown that major conservation efforts need to be implemented to overcome challenges like consumer behaviour, bush meat demand, and illegal trade. Further, government bodies, forest department, and civil societies must work together to bring about the necessary changes that are required to reduce

the illegal trade and consumption in the state through cooperation and engagement with communities at grassroot levels.

References

Jerozolimski, A. & C.A. Peres (2003). Bringing home the biggest bacon: a cross-site analysis of the structure of hunter-kill profiles in Neotropical forests. *Biological Conservation* 111(3): 415–425.
Rakotonirina, B. & A. Cooke (1994). Sea turtles of Madagascar - their status, exploitation and conservation. *Oryx* 28(1): 51–61.

Acknowledgements: I would like to extend my sincere gratitude and thanks to Dr. Namita Brahma & Dr. Dhritiman Das for their constructive feedback, assistance and encouragement throughout the entire process.

Hrista Debbarman

Old Guest House Lane, Khosh Bagan, Kartar Bari, Near N.S. Road, Agartala, Tripura (west) 799001, India.
Email: hrista.db@gmail.com

Citation: Debbarman, H. (2023). People's perception on turtle meat consumption in Tripura. *Reptile Rap* #231, In: *Zoo's Print* 38(4): 17–21.