

**THE EFFECT ON RETAINING TURTLE HATCHLINGS
IN TANKS BEFORE THEIR RELEASE**

Suhashini Hewavisenthi and S.W. Kotagama
The Open University, Nawala.

Turtle hatchlings undergo a frenzy of activity lasting several hours after emergence. This is supposed to be a survival mechanism to reduce the time during which the hatchlings are exposed to predators on the beach and near shore.

In certain turtle hatcheries in Sri Lanka, hatchlings are retained for 3 or more days before being released to the sea. The reason is attributed to a marine leech which attacks the hatchlings at the abdominal slit.

This study was carried out during January to March 1989 and October to December 1989 at the Victor Hasselblad turtle hatchery, Kosgoda. Olive ridley (Lepidochelys olivacea) (n=335), green turtle (Chelonia mydas) (n=375), hawksbill (Eretmochelys imbricata) (n=42), and leatherback (Dermodochelys coriacea) (n=50) hatchlings were released on the beach, on the zero, first, second and seven days after emergence. The distance moved, on their way towards the surf within 30 seconds was measured.

Statistical analysis revealed that the number of days retained in the tanks had a significant effect (1% level of significance) on the distance moved by the hatchlings. The distance moved could be used to assess the energy they possess. It is likely that their energy decreases with the increased number of days retained in tanks.

Therefore hatchlings from turtle hatcheries, should be released to the sea, as soon as possible without retaining them in tanks. Otherwise they might not possess the energy to escape the aquatic predators and may die before they reach their feeding grounds.

Similar studies have not been carried out in other countries because the hatchlings are released to the sea immediately after their emergence.