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Sea turtles in Ishigaki Island, Okinawa

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Ishigaki Island, Okinawa, is one of the important nesting grounds for sea turtles in

Japan, as nesting activity of all three species which nest in Japanese waters are observed.

These are the green turtle (Chelonia mydas), loggerhead turtle (Caretta caretta) and

hawksbill turtle (Eretmochelys imbricata). In this study, the current status of the

nesting population of sea turtles in Ishigaki Island was investigated by tagging and

nesting survey. The annual number of sea turtle nests all along the coast of the island

was up to 150 during 1995-2003. Ibaruma Beach (3 km in length), the biggest nesting

ground on the island, was nightly patrolled to survey the nesting turtles. The nesting

season of C. caretta was from April through July, and that of C. mydas was from May

through August, sometimes continuing until December. During 1993-2003, the

number of annual nests is 0-8, 12-38, and 0-2 for C. caretta, C. mydas, and E. imbricata,

respectively. A tagging study shows that C. caretta and C. mydas nest up to at least 3

and 7 times in a year, respectively. The re-migrating rate of nesting *C. mydas* was

69 %, and the average re-migrating interval was 3.7 years. Using these data, the status

of sea turtle nesting population using the beaches on Ishigaki Island is discussed.

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