

## Overharvesting the Pig-Nosed Turtle

**Scientists study the overharvesting of the pig-nosed turtle.**

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Scientists are assisting communities in the Kikori Delta in Papua New Guinea to conserve the unique pig-nosed turtle.

The study will look at ways to ensure the survival of "this iconic species for conservationists worldwide," said program leader Arthur Georges of the University of Canberra.

The pig-nosed turtle program is aimed at protecting and conserving rare and endemic local flora and fauna species for the benefit of science and future generations of Papua New Guinea.

"The pig-nosed turtle is one of our most spectacular species," Georges said. "As the last surviving species of a once widespread family of turtles, the pig-nosed turtle is of great interest to scientists and conservation groups around the world."

The pig-nosed turtle has been an important food source for local communities in the Kikori Delta for generations and the people are intent on seeing that this resource remains available for more generations to come.

However, Georges warns that, like any fishery, there is a risk of turtle population collapse if there is over-harvesting.

"A first step is to determine if the species is in fact in decline, and if it is, to determine how serious the decline is," he said. "We all want to see the pig-nosed turtle populations managed sustainably into the future."

Another part of the study will focus on sex ratios.

"The pig-nosed turtle is unusual in that the sex of the baby turtles depends on nest temperatures during incubation in the egg," Georges said. "If the nest is hot, you will get all females, if it is cool, you get all males."

He adds that there are obvious concerns for this species if the climate warms, but it is also important to know which geographic areas in the delta produce males and which areas produce females.