

Actual conditions and challenges of Environmental education featuring Sea turtles

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1. Objectives and background

There have been deep relationships between sea turtles and human beings through the ages and sea turtles have been used as food and accessories in our culture. On the other hand, all sea turtle species except flatback sea turtle are listed in the red data book published by International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources and the existence of them is on the ropes now. In Japan, some citizens have continued conservation activities for sea turtles by observing sea turtles and monitoring sea turtles' eggs laying on the beaches since 1950s. Furthermore, some local governments enacted conservation ordinances for sea turtles.

These activities have had significances of conservation for sea turtles and now have the meanings of environmental education for children as well. However, these activities, which are based on schools in most cases, have not been evaluated scientifically and systematically though a lot of documents about conservation for sea turtles collected by each activity are available.

In this paper, the actual condition of environmental education based on conservation activities for sea turtles was investigated by interviews conducted in the five schools and then the effects of the environmental education on local communities and conservation activities was clarified. Finally, this study suggested desirable direction of environmental conservation activities and environmental education for the future.

2. Methods

The interviews were conducted at the following five schools in which environmental education featuring sea turtles was or used to be taught for children. These are Kayo elementary school in Okinawa prefecture, Toriyama elementary school in Kagoshima prefecture, Hiwasa junior high school in Tokushima prefecture, Kamoda elementary school in Tokushima prefecture and Omaezaki elementary school in Shizuoka prefecture. Main questions were summarized as follows; 1) the culture related with sea turtles in the local community, 2) the history of these conservation activities about sea turtles 3) the contents of conservation activities for sea turtles, and 4) the ripple effects of conservation activities for sea turtles.

3. Results

There are common activities among five schools such as monitoring sea turtles' egg laying, observation of hatch of sea turtles' eggs, breeding and releasing child sea turtles to the sea and cleaning beaches. These activities at schools created valuable datasets which made ecological contributions concerning sea turtles. These datasets have also the useful effects on enactment of ordinances for sea turtles at some local governments. After Kayo elementary school, Hiwasa junior high school and Kamoda elementary school ceased their activities about sea turtles, the local governments have continued these schools' activities so that it seems reasonable to suppose that those activities at schools had valuable impacts for the governments. The environmental education awoke the good effects on children's emotional development like respects for life and their local communities. It was clarified that the conservation activities and environmental education featuring sea turtles have been supported by various actors such as schools, local governments, specialists, local residents.

4. Conclusion

This study clarified the importance of enhancing collaboration with schools, local governments, local residents, civilian organizations and specialist by implementing well-controlled conservation activities and environmental education. It may safely be assumed that the environmental education featuring sea turtles during period of compulsory education plays significant roles from the viewpoints of not only conservation for sea turtles but also cultivation of human resources for environmental conservation.