



# Saving Sea Turtle Eggs

## Part 1

**Teacher Reads** Wildlife poaching is when people kill animals or take eggs from animal nests. Poaching is a serious problem and is against the law. Let's learn why sea turtles are at risk because of poaching.

Sea turtles are reptiles that spend most of their time in  
11 the ocean. During nesting season, sea turtles come ashore  
20 on beaches to dig holes, lay eggs, and cover them with sand.  
32 Then the sea turtles return to the ocean. Eventually, the eggs  
43 hatch and the baby sea turtles make their way from the beach  
55 into the ocean. But sometimes those eggs never get the  
65 chance to hatch. That's because people called poachers steal  
74 the eggs from nests to sell as food. Poaching sea turtle eggs  
86 from nests is **illegal** because sea turtles are endangered.

## Part 2

**Teacher Reads** Scientists in Costa Rica, a country in Central America, developed a unique plan to stop poachers from gathering and selling sea turtle eggs.

95 One scientist came up with a decoy egg, which is a fake  
107 egg that seems like the real thing. The decoy egg had to fool  
120 poachers into thinking it was real. If poachers stole the decoy  
131 eggs, scientists could track where the poachers went to sell  
141 the eggs.

143 A sea turtle egg is about the size of a ping pong ball. The  
157 eggshell is soft and elastic. The decoy eggs had to look and  
169 feel like the real eggs, so scientists made plastic decoy eggs  
180 with a 3D printer. An artist painted each plastic decoy egg to  
192 look like it was real. Then scientists cut apart the decoy eggs  
204 so a GPS tracker could go inside each one and send alerts to  
217 an app telling where the tracker is. Last, the egg parts were  
229 joined together to seal the egg with the GPS tracker inside.



## Part 2 continued

240 Scientists placed the decoy eggs in 101 sea turtle nests.  
250 The hope was that poachers would not notice the difference  
260 between the decoy eggs and the real eggs. Poachers steal  
270 eggs from nests at night. In the dark, it would be hard to  
283 tell which eggs were real and which were not.

## Part 3

**Teacher Reads** The decoy egg project may help the sea turtle population grow. If sea turtle eggs are no longer poached, it may be possible for hundreds of baby turtles to hatch.

292 Scientists discovered that poachers picked up some of  
300 the decoy eggs. With the GPS trackers inside, scientists  
309 tracked the eggs to see where the poachers traveled to  
319 sell the eggs. The GPS trackers also tracked where the  
329 stolen eggs ended up after being sold. Scientists would  
338 know where to spend time educating communities about  
346 the risk to sea turtles because of poaching, which could  
356 help enforce laws against poaching.

361 Why did people poach eggs? In many cases, the poachers  
371 had very little money. They poached the eggs to sell for  
382 money. They needed money to pay for food and other things.

393 But the goal of the plan was not just to stop the poachers.  
406 The goal was to find where the eggs were sold and who  
418 paid for the eggs. The people who paid for the eggs were  
430 the ones who needed to be stopped. There would be no  
441 need to poach eggs if no one was willing to pay for them.

454 Poaching is a hard problem to solve. The decoy eggs  
464 are just one tool that has the potential to help protect  
475 sea turtles.

477