

THE TURTLE FISHERIES OF THE SEYCHELLES ISLANDS.

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Paragraph 73.

Besides this large traffic in living turtle, considerable numbers were slaughtered to make calipee for the London market and quitouze for the home trade. The former is the product obtained by drying the dense semi-cartilaginous connective tissue joining the bones of the carapace and the plastron; the latter is the flesh of the turtle, salted and sun-dried.

74.

Early in the present century vigorous efforts began to be made to develop to their utmost the natural resources of the southern islands in guano, timber, cured fish and the products of the turtle. The accommodation on the vessels plying to the islands being taken up by labourers and cargo, the space available for conveying live turtle was much reduced in consequence, with the result that the live turtle food supply of Victoria was, and continues to be, reduced to one-tenth of what it previously was.

75.

The average amount of dried calipee obtained from one turtle is about $1\frac{1}{2}$ -kilo., or $3\frac{1}{2}$ -lbs. The declared value of this works out at not over 3s. 6d. a pound, so to obtain calipee worth 11s. 8d., some oil, and an insignificant amount of badly-cured dry fish, a magnificent animal worth £2 to £2.10s., if delivered alive in Victoria, is sacrificed. During the three years, 1923 to 1925, 21,558 kilos of calipee were exported, a quantity representing the destruction of upwards of 14,000 turtles. This enormous number was contributed almost entirely by the islands of Assumption, Aláabra, and Cosmolido, leased by the Seychelles Guano Co. Ltd.

76.

The manufacture of the various products is carried on by the same primitive methods as have prevailed from time immemorial. The animal after being harpooned in the sea, or turned on the beach, is taken to the settlement and placed on its back in an open shed near the beach. There it remains till the next morning when it is dragged some way down the beach; a labourer with the aid of an axe hacks off the head and four flippers, and then, with a sharp knife, the plastron is separated from the carapace, and the entrails removed. The flesh is next cut away and thrown into a tub. This done an operator hacks off a wide marginal strip from each side of the carapace. These strips and the whole of the plastron are placed in water in an iron pan or boiler and a fire lit beneath. Fifteen minutes after the water begins to boil the parts are taken out and the yellow tortoise-shell plates on the plastron removed as quickly as possible, as they and the calipee cannot be removed easily except while still warm. One man attends to the marginal strips and another to the plastron. The latter, as soon as he has lifted off the yellow shell, cuts out three semi-circular portions on each side, connected by a basal strip; next he cuts a club shaped portion from the central region of the plastron, roughly

between

the projections of the bony framework of the plastron proper. A great deal of waste occurs, as much of the tissue between the "prongs" of the framework is left.

The second man cuts out the points of the ribs where they penetrate the marginal mass of calipee, and also the cylindrical bones along the outer edge. This region yields two strips, one narrow, cut off before removal of the rib-ends, the other broader but more irregular in shape. These strips of calipee are then trimmed in order to remove all trace of blood and oil. Much unnecessary loss occurs during this trimming process. When the work is completed, the strips and pieces are well washed in fresh water, afterwards being laid upon flakes, having a wire-netting floor. Each night the drying calipee is brought indoors, to be relaid to dry in the sun the next morning. It must be dried "bone-dry" if it is to keep in good condition on the voyage to Europe; this drying takes about a fortnight, even in dry sunny weather.

77 The yellow plates of tortoiseshell from the plastron are much more valuable than the marbled shell of the back; both are, however, occasionally shipped to Europe; the price obtained even for the best selected quality is very low, seldom over 10/- per lb., and the material is often unsaleable on account of lack of demand.

78 Much of the flesh cut off the turtle is given out as a ration in place of fish to the labourers employed at the Settlement. What is left is usually turned into "quitouze" in the following manner. Without being washed, the flesh is rubbed with salt and left in a barrel for a day and a night, when it is taken out and pressed, preferably in a gunny sack, under a plank, weighted with stones, for a day, thereafter being put on flakes to dry in the sun. The pressing is done in order to squeeze out as much briny fluid as possible before drying. This product is usually very carelessly and roughly prepared, and is barely fit for human consumption. Given reasonable care, it might easily be greatly improved both in appearance and in quality.

79 Two other methods of preparation are also in use, "viande de tortue salee," and "tortue marinade". The former is a variation on "quitouze", where, instead of drying after salting and pressing, the flesh is put up in casks in brine. "Tortue marinade" is a much superior quality but is seldom made owing to the high cost of preparation. In this case, selected slices cut from the plastron and limbs, after being fried in turtle oil, are packed when cool into casks, which are then filled with more turtle oil and finally headed up for transport to Mahe.

80 Oil is obtained by rendering down the fat of the turtle in an open pan without water. The quality would be improved if a jacketed pan were used. From the heart a small quantity of oil understood to have special properties, is extracted in the same manner. The bones when ground down have value for manurial purposes; considerable quantities were exported from 1911 to 1915, but none has been

NOTE ON THE TRANSPORT ALIVE OF THE GREEN TURTLE.

Paragraph 128

According to information supplied to the Commissioner of the Cayman Islands near Jamaica in 1909, by Mr. Edmund Parsons, J.P. the manner in which the turtle are transported from the fishing grounds by the Cayman fishermen is to carry them on their backs with their flippers fastened together on each side, the fore to the hinder, a hole being bored in each one for the purpose either with a red-hot poker or a large sail needle; this is done to prevent them beating and bruising themselves.

129

They are stowed in the fishing vessels in two tiers, the lower on the ballast which is levelled with small pebbles, with a layer of thatch palms on top to form a bedding; the upper tier is placed on a board platform laid on sleepers placed across in the hold, above the first tier.

They are stowed up against each other to prevent them "fetching away", with a wedge-like chock beneath. Larger blocks of wood (buoys for the fishing nets being utilised) are placed under their heads, and those that cannot be stowed 'neath deck are carried under awnings on deck.

130

Prior to the institution of direct fast steamer connection between Jamaica and London, large numbers of green turtle were conveyed by sailing brigs direct to London from the Caymans and Jamaica. One brig called the "Eastern Star" of 337 tons burden, made several voyages; she would carry 330 odd head of live turtle. These were carried in tanks filled with sea-water. Every other day they were fed upon turtle grass (so called from the fact that this grass is largely the food of the green turtle) which grows abundantly on muddy bottom in shallow water around the islands; several tons were carried for this purpose.

Often the voyage would take 40 or more days and the turtle were generally delivered with a loss of only 40 to 50 head. (Lambert, 5.)

131

These old sailing vessels have long disappeared and the supplies, greatly reduced in quantity, which now reach London, are conveyed by steamer. Contrary to what one would expect in view of the speedier voyage made by steam craft, the mortality is very serious and compares most unfavourably with that given above. It is not infrequent to have a death rate of as much as 50% among turtle shipped to England by steamer. Such turtle are carried on their backs, and except that they are protected by an awning and have water sprinkled over them periodically, they receive no attention.

132

The universal practice is to carry turtle on their backs; to keep them for any length of time on their belly (plastron)- that is, in the position they have when in the water- is condemned by all who have had experience in the transport of turtle. This is due to the fact that the connection between the plastron and the carapace not being rigid, the

Paragraph 132
(continued)

To keep a green turtle on its plastron instead of turned over on its back, causes the animal to die of suffocation within a few hours in consequence of the continued pressure of the plastron against the lungs. The struggles of a turtle lying on its belly are also more violent than when turned on its back.

133 Without doubt the old method of shipping turtle in tanks of sea-water, wherein they were fed every other day on turtle grass is the most satisfactory system of transport which it is possible to devise; it gives the best possible results, for besides decreasing the loss by death to a minimum, it enables the shipper to land his cargo in prime condition, fat and healthy.

If the lessees of the outlying islands would cooperate for this purpose, it would, I feel sure, prove a profitable undertaking to fit up a small schooner with tanks for the regular transport of turtle to the Mahe market.

134 Failing this, the turtle must continue to be carried lying turned on their carapace; the fore and hind flippers on each side should be tied together to prevent them from injuring themselves in their struggles; water should be poured over them morning and afternoon and an awning or other cover provided to protect them from the sun. A block of wood or other material should be placed under the head and they should be so shored up and wedged in as to take no injury if the vessel meets a rough sea.

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