

## Episode 22b: Turtles in Panama (Part 2)

### Summary

In the second part of a two-part episode, Nick and Wendy talk about seeing baby turtles hatch on a beach at a turtle conservation project in Panama.

### Transcript

Nick: This is Part 2 of Wendy and I talking about our experience volunteering at a turtle conservation project in Panama. And so we were talking last time about how we saw a mother turtle come and lay her eggs and it was quite a beautiful and amazing experience to see. And in fact, uhh, these sea turtles will come back to the same beach that they were born on to lay their eggs.

Wendy: Yeah.

Nick: And so it was, it's quite amazing that they are able to instinctively know where to go back to to do that. And this particular turtle, it was the first time that she'd come to lay eggs on that beach because - or certainly since the conservation project had started - because they tag the turtles and they're able to recognise them that way. And as we were saying at the end of Part 1, the ... we were taking the eggs out as the turtle was laying them so that we could save them, essentially, from poachers. And so, as you mentioned, they have a hatchery, uhh, which is where you can rebury the eggs and then that's a safe place that's guarded by the people who work for the conservation project and then the poachers can't get to them. But unfortunately the turtle didn't know that and she actually spent quite a lot of time covering up her hole even though the eggs were already gone, and as you said she was in this trance and not really aware of what we were doing. And, so she spends a huge amount of time and effort trying to cover up the hole so that no one will know where her eggs are, but of course as we talked about, they make such a huge mess, and they make these huge tracks, when they move back down to the water, that it's very obvious exactly where the eggs are laid.

Wendy: Yeah, because she's never going to be able to cover up her tracks behind her, you know, as she heads back down the beach into the water.

Nick: And it's possible when the tide comes in that those tracks could be covered up at a later time. But certainly, for example, if there was no conservation project, the poachers could easily determine that night or the next morning where those eggs

were. And so sometimes if ... because the eggs need to be re-laid quite quickly, so sometimes if you're at the far end of the beach, the people working at the conservation project would re-lay them, uhh, just a little bit away from where they were originally and then they would create a kind of map, almost like a treasure map, so that they would know where they were, umm, but that the poachers wouldn't know where they were. And so we had the honour of being able to name this turtle.

Wendy: Yeah.

Nick: Because it was a turtle that was unknown to them, umm, as we said, and so we named her Jessie after our friend Jessie who had given birth herself, I think, a week or two before.

Wendy: Yeah, just a few days before that.

Nick: And so that was a nice little thing that we got the opportunity to do. And so that was on our first night and so we thought, "Oh, this is great! Every night we get to go out and see this amazing thing of seeing a mother turtle lay her eggs." Unfortunately on all of the subsequent nights, I think two or three more nights, we didn't see, uhh, another turtle laying eggs.

Wendy: No, we didn't. And I remember there was a group of students who came just for one night and we went out with some of them and that was their only night there and so they were really disappointed that they didn't get to see a turtle laying eggs. Umm, but we were happy that we were at least, you know, able to stay for a few nights, so one out of those four nights or whatever it was that we were there, we did have that experience.

Nick: Yeah, and it just happened to be<sup>1</sup> the first night. But certainly when you get up in the middle of the night and you walk for four hours up and down the beach, it's a little bit disappointing and you're a little bit deflated<sup>2</sup> when you go back. And so basically when we were staying at this place, you just spend the days lazing around<sup>3</sup>, there wasn't really much else to do, and you'd be sleeping so that you could be ready to get up in the middle of the night for your turtle patrol.

And so on our last morning, just before we were about to leave, we got told that there was, umm, that there were some baby turtles which were about to hatch. And I guess they knew that, uhh, the conservation project people knew that because they had seen that some of them had already hatched. And it seems as though they

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<sup>1</sup> just happened to be: randomly was (it could have been any other night, but it was this night)

<sup>2</sup> deflated: disappointed, in this case. Literally: without air (the opposite of inflated)

<sup>3</sup> lazing around (phrasal verb: to laze around): to be lazy, to not do much

don't all hatch right exactly at the same time, it can take place<sup>4</sup> over several hours. So they said six of them had already hatched and they'd seen the shells on the beach, so they said that they knew that there were more that hadn't hatched yet. And so they told us and then we went out on the beach again and we had to walk quite a long way up the beach again, but this time during the day, so we could at least see a little bit better, umm, to wait for the rest of these baby turtles to hatch.

Wendy: Umm-hmm.

Nick: And so there were eleven more that hatched while we were there, and that was really something.

Wendy: Yeah, it was.

Nick: And it was great to have that, to have those two different experiences because it's the two end points, I guess, of this cycle, that we got to see the mother turtle laying eggs and then we got to see the turtles, obviously from a different mother, umm, hatching, right there on the beach.

Wendy: Yeah, and you really see the difference, uhh, between the baby turtle and the adult. Uhh, these were leatherback turtles which is the largest species of sea turtle and the adult, the female that we saw laying eggs, just looked enormous to us, and the biologist that we, uhh, were working with, he told us, "No actually she's small compared to most adults," uhh, but to us she seemed enormous. And then the babies, I could hold them in the palm of my hand. Uhh, they were so, so tiny and so cute, and it was amazing to think that they would grow up into that size.

Nick: And so when they hatch, what they're trying to do is get into the water. But they're very disoriented, umm, and they don't, obviously, have their parent to help them, and so they were just kind of spinning around, and just looked completely dazed<sup>5</sup> and didn't know what they were doing. And so we were there with a couple of biologists from the project, umm, but they said it's very important that the turtles do find their own way to the water. We could have easily lifted them up and helped them go down to the water, and they did let us lift them up a little but, but they said, "You have to put them down and you have to let them find their way," and then that's maybe one of the reasons why they're able to come back to that beach to lay eggs if they become mothers later on in their life, that they have this very short experience of being on that beach when they were born.

Wendy: Umm-hmm.

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<sup>4</sup> take place: happen (in time or location)

<sup>5</sup> dazed: stunned, confused

Nick: And so some of them adapted more quickly than others and they started to go towards the water but they're so small and they're turtles so they're very slow that it took a long time. And we were trying to clear a path, to clear away some of the wood, umm, away so that it would be easier for them to do it. But they didn't work in a team or as a group in any way, they were just these 11 individuals just kind of trying to find their own way and some of them found it more quickly than others.

Wendy: Yep, and the ones who hadn't found it yet, they didn't seem to necessarily follow the same path when they saw that their brothers or sisters had found the right way. They just kept doing their own thing and going around in circles<sup>6</sup> and they were confused. And to be fair, they were newborns, you know. I mean, a human newborn would be completely at a loss<sup>7</sup> too, so these guys are much more independent than humans are at that age.

Nick: And so it was only about 20 metres from the, where ... the place where they hatched but it took the earliest ones about half an hour and the latest ones about one hour to make that journey to the water. And so we just stood there that whole time watching them and it was just incredible to see these tiny little things just taking their very first steps and trying to get themselves to the water where they're far more comfortable in terms of their movement and everything else. And so finally we would see them hit the water and the waves would be crashing and it was, you know, it just seemed like such a daunting<sup>8</sup>, uhh, challenge for them to survive at that age by themselves and, unfortunately, many of them don't survive.

Wendy: No, most of them don't grow up to reach adulthood, uhh, because they have so many predators in the ocean who can just swallow them up in one bite and, uhh, yeah, and perhaps, you know, if we hadn't been there, many of them might not have made it out of the hole and might not have made it, you know, down to the beach to begin with<sup>9</sup>. Because the biologists were actually helping some of them to get out of the sand in the very beginning when they were hatching. So, yeah, they have lots of, umm, lots of obstacles to overcome and, uhh, hopefully with these projects, uhh, more and more of them will have a chance to live long enough to grow up and lay their own eggs and the species will continue.

Nick: Yeah, and certainly I think, we ... it was a great way to end that experience for us was to see these tiny little turtles hit the water and start swimming away for the

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<sup>6</sup> going around in circles: in this case, the turtles were actually going around in circles. But it's also a common expression to mean 'not getting anywhere'.

<sup>7</sup> at a loss: not knowing what to do

<sup>8</sup> daunting: scary, difficult

<sup>9</sup> to begin with: in the first place, at the beginning

first time and, you know, even though the odds are against them<sup>10</sup>, it was the start of their journey and it was a really nice thing to see.

Wendy: It was, yeah.

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<sup>10</sup> the odds are against them: their chances are not good (from gambling)

## Comprehension Questions

1. Why did Nick and Wendy name the mother turtle Jessie?
2. How did the conservation project workers know that a hatching was about to take place?
3. According to Nick, why can't you help the baby turtles get to the ocean by carrying them there?

## Exercises

*Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.*

1. The Lord of the Rings books and movies \_\_\_\_\_ in Middle-earth.
2. This time next week it will be the holidays and I'm going to be \_\_\_\_\_ at the beach. I can't wait!
3. I didn't like him much \_\_\_\_\_, but after what he said about you, I like him even less.
4. My football team is playing against the best team in the league tomorrow. I hope they win, but \_\_\_\_\_.
5. I was very lucky to get this new job. I \_\_\_\_\_ in the right place at the right time.
6. I'm \_\_\_\_\_ to explain how the burglary happened. I'm positive that we locked all the doors and there's no sign of a break-in.
7. We're \_\_\_\_\_ with this new software project. Every time we think we're making progress, something goes wrong and we have to start again.
8. The knock to his head left him \_\_\_\_\_ and unable to think clearly.
9. After his team lost the championship game, he felt utterly \_\_\_\_\_.
10. When you start hiking up a mountain and you look to the top, the climb ahead can seem quite \_\_\_\_\_.

## Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Which of the two experiences described in this episode would you like to see the most: the mother turtle laying eggs or the baby turtles hatching? Why?
2. How does it make you feel to know that there are poachers trying to kill turtles and steal their eggs?
3. Do you think animal babies are more independent than human babies, as Wendy said?

## Answers

### Comprehension Questions

1. They named the mother turtle Jessie after their friend Jessie who became a mother shortly before.
2. The staff knew more baby turtles were about to hatch because some baby turtles from that nest had already hatched but they knew there were more eggs.
3. The turtles need that initial experience on the beach, and the future mother turtles will come back to the same beach to lay eggs based on these first few minutes of their life.

### Exercises

1. take place
2. lazing around
3. to begin with
4. the odds are against them
5. just happened to be
6. at a loss
7. going around in circles
8. dazed
9. deflated
10. daunting