



# surf RESCUE

**T**here are seven species of marine turtles worldwide and four of those forage and nest on the eastern beaches of the peninsula: they are the green, olive ridley, hawksbill and flatback turtles. Sea turtles on Western Cape York are in real decline, with nesting populations threatened by extinction within 25 years. Adult animals are being entangled and drowned in ghost nets and a large population of scavenging feral pigs has destroyed over 95% of nests on some beaches. Combined with the fact that sea turtles have relatively low reproductive success and high juvenile mortality, it follows that the future for turtles on the Western Cape is in critical condition.

Presently, all species except the Australian flatback are listed in the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources' Red List as endangered or vulnerable. All marine turtles are included in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora and all species except the flatback are listed in Appendices I and II of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals. There can be no doubt that if these magnificent animals are to be safeguarded from eventual extinction, comprehensive, focused and integrated efforts must be undertaken on a global scale.

Today, thousands of individuals in volunteer and government-supported management and conservation programmes throughout the world are working to conserve marine turtles. Although marine turtles spend the majority of their time at sea, these programmes primarily focus on nesting beach activities. The camp at Cape York is no different and opens seasonally to coincide with peak nesting times for the olive ridley and flatback turtles.

A trip to this camp provides a unique opportunity for those who enjoy remote wildlife experiences. The camp is accessed through the small Aboriginal community of Mapoon some 80 kilometres north of the town of Weipa and the main

airport of the region. A typical 24 hours at the Chivaree Camp includes working with both indigenous rangers, and researchers and scientists and learning, in a hands-on manner, about the environment and its conservation. It is a real chance to discover more about the local ecosystem and the delicate balance required to ensure the future of the turtles.

You can also accompany the rangers on night time beach patrols to view these majestic creatures making their nest and carefully laying their eggs. When you find a turtle it's all about getting down in the sand and helping the rangers count the eggs, measure and weigh the turtle, and, most importantly, attaching an



*The isolated Cape York Peninsula of Queensland, Australia, has long been home to an indigenous aboriginal community but has recently begun to welcome visitors and volunteers to a special sea turtle rescue project. At The Chivaree Camp you can join a group of fellow travellers and local aboriginal people working to save the dwindling turtle population of the Western Cape, just 200 kilometres from Australia's most northerly point.*



'exclusion' device that prevents local predators, such as feral pigs and dingos, eating the eggs.

When you're staying at Chivaree, you enter a new time zone. You don't need watches, the night beach patrols are planned around the tides and everything else simply fits in between. There is also plenty of time to sit back and relax in the calm breeze flowing through the casuarina trees.

**Rachel Wood**  
Australia Programme Manager

**WEB PLUS**

[www.audley.co.uk/features/capeyork](http://www.audley.co.uk/features/capeyork)  
Discover more about the turtle rescue and how to get involved



**FACT FILE**

A two week trip to Australia incorporating a four night stay at Camp Chivaree costs from £2,900 per person including flights and accommodation. Please call Helen, Paul or Jenny on 01993 838 800 for details.

