



09 MAY, 2026

## Using advanced tech to protect hawksbill turtles

Daily Express (KK), Malaysia



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KOTA KINABALU: Authorities and conservation groups are now using cutting-edge technology to collect more data to strengthen turtle conservation efforts.

Sabah Wildlife Department, WWF-Malaysia and Matakang Reef Resort, which signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for the project, will focus on data collection on the critically endangered hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*).

The two-year project builds on long-standing conservation partnerships on Matakang Island, where the Sabah Wildlife Department, together with Matakang Reef Resort and WWF-Malaysia, recorded over 460 hawksbill turtle nests between 2009 and 2025, including 119 nests in 2025 alone.

Those technologies include ShellBank, a traceability toolkit and global database of marine turtle DNA that enables conservationists and enforcement agencies to identify populations and trace sea turtles, dead or alive, back to their population of origin.

“Complementing this, satellite tracking will monitor sea turtle movements along their migratory routes, helping to identify critical habitats and generate data for more targeted conservation action.

“By combining genetic analysis with real-time tracking, the project equips the Government and conservation partners with a powerful tool to safeguard these ancient mariners across Sabah and the wider region,” said a joint statement.

WWF-Malaysia Partnerships senior director Tay Mooi Geok said they had very

little information about where hawksbill turtles go after they lay eggs on shores in Semporna.

“Soon, we will gain these insights, helping us better conserve them.”

Matakang Reef Resort Managing Director Sophia Sie said Matakang Island is one of Sabah’s most important hawksbill turtle nesting sites.

“As a business operating here, we are committed to safeguarding these turtles and making conservation a core part of our work, supported by our in-house team and honorary wildlife wardens.”

This project, in collaboration with Universiti Malaysia Sabah and the Marine Research Foundation, is catalysed by early support from Albizia & Friends.

These efforts will also contribute to the Blue Corridors for Turtles initiative (BC4T), which seeks to map turtle movements by connecting nesting beaches, migratory routes and foraging grounds.

“By integrating genetic and movement data, BC4T aims to build a clearer, science-based understanding of distinct turtle populations across the region to inform Important Marine Turtle Areas (IMTAs).”

The MoU will also further strengthen collaborative management, integrate scientific research into practical conservation actions, and reinforce enforcement efforts to protect sea turtles from illegal trade, bycatch and poaching.



Group photo of the MoU signing ceremony with representatives from the Sabah Wildlife Department, WWF-Malaysia and Matakang Reef Resrt. (Pic: Lim Pey Chen / WWF-Malaysia)



The critically endangered Hawksbill turtle is among the sea turtle species found in Sabah waters. (Pic: Eric Madeja / WWF-Malaysia)



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### SUMMARIES

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