

Giant turtle is not a safe menu item

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OUR taste for sea turtle is the main force driving the animals to extinction, and it's not too good for those eating it, either.

Researchers in the US and Mexico have documented numerous reports worldwide of health hazards associated with eating turtle, including food poisoning with *Salmonella*. Sea turtles also pick up marine toxins, possibly from algae, which are not removed by washing or cooking and can kill up to a fifth of people affected. And because turtles live so long, they accumulate metals and pesticides: levels of cadmium are three times as high, and mercury 10 times as high, as in tuna. The survey will be published later this month in *EcoHealth*.

These hazards are not widely known, says co-author Wallace J. Nichols of the California Academy of Sciences, because turtle meat is often illegal and unregulated. "We must spread this information, as there are lives at stake," he says.

That might put off affluent diners who now eat turtles as a delicacy. That will benefit endangered turtles, and the advice should also help the people who depend on them for sustenance, such as some aboriginal groups.

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