

Saving the endangered sea turtle from extinction



BY PETER MURURI

While conservation efforts have always been geared toward saving the big species — lions, elephants and rhinos on land — man's cruelty towards nature now extends to the deep waters.

Why, you may ask, would one want to harm a sea turtle? Very few swimmers in the Indian Ocean have ever come across a sea turtle.

They are not usually found on the shallows. But their geographical compass dictates that they come to the soft sands on the beaches to nest. And that is where danger beckons.

According to the World Wide Fund for Nature, sea turtles face extinction and are placed among the endangered species in need of special protection. "They are slaughtered for their eggs,

meat, skin and shells, sea turtles suffer from poaching and over-exploitation. They also face habitat destruction and accidental capture in fishing gear," says WWF.

They are also victims of climate change as global warming raises the sand temperatures interfering with their nesting. Sea turtles are found at the Coast, next to top tourist resorts.

Thus, any conservation efforts must involve the local tour operators.

For example, Serena Beach and Resort Spa initiated a turtle conservation project back in 1993.

The initiative established a turtle nest protection programme, where turtle eggs around the Shanzu Bay, Mitwapa, Kikambala and Kenenai beaches

are protected and hatched. "Tourism cannot be practised apart from conservation. Without species conservation, there would be no tourism," says Rosemary Mugambi, regional sales and marketing director at Serena Hotels.

In order to protect the turtle eggs from threats, hatching cages made of wood and encased with a light-gauge mesh are placed on the beach lawn of the hotel.

To avoid disorienting the new turtles towards the hotel, lights are dimmed so that the new hatchlings can head to the water, a route they have to implant in their brains for future reference. If such efforts are not entrenched, then we will lose our turtles in the next 50 years.