

Editorial

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It gives me great pleasure to introduce the Indian Ocean Turtle Newsletter, which will serve as a forum for discussing issues regarding the conservation and management of sea turtles and their habitats in South and Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean. The newsletter aims to disseminate information in a timely manner about sea turtles and their habitats to government departments and other concerned government agencies, voluntary organizations, NGOs, fisherfolk associations, community groups, universities and students as well as other institutions and individuals involved with the conservation and management of sea turtles and their habitats. It will provide a mechanism through which awareness about the status of sea turtles and their habitats can be disseminated to a wide audience, and will be a medium to communicate with the international community (researchers, conservation organisations and other interested parties) about sea turtle related activity in the region.

The first issue has a focus on sea turtle conservation in Orissa on the east coast of India. In this issue, we review legislation related to sea turtle conservation in Orissa and evaluate its efficacy. We also present the views and perspectives of various stakeholders including traditional and mechanised fisherfolk on sea turtle conservation measures in Orissa. The issue includes profiles of various non government organisations working in Orissa on fisheries and on sea turtle conservation. Finally the issue includes a bibliography of literature on sea turtles in Orissa.

In forthcoming issues, we intend to focus on other parts of India and South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean islands. In keeping with our philosophy of open access, the newsletter will be distributed free to subscribers and will also be available online.

A Review of Legislation and Conservation Measures for Sea Turtles in Orissa, India

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Introduction

In Orissa on the eastern coast of India occurs the well-known phenomenon of synchronous mass nesting - the 'arribada' - exhibited by the olive ridley turtles (*Lepidochelys olivacea*). The mass nesting beaches are located at three sites - Gahirmatha, Rushikulya and the Devi River mouth (Pandav et al., 1998). Olive ridley turtles nesting at these locations are part of a distinct genetic population that nest along the east coast of India (Shanker et al., 2004a). The recent failure of arribadas in 1997 and 1998

accompanied by the sharp decrease in size of adults suggest a potential or imminent decline in the population, consistent with fishery-related mortality of at least 1,00,000 turtles since 1994, and 10,000-15,000 turtles per year since 1999 (Pandav, 2000; Shanker et al., 2004b). Much of this mortality is attributed to drowning in trawl nets (Pandav and Choudhury, 1999), but recent accounts suggest that gill nets may also cause large scale mortality (Wright and Mohanty, 2001).