



EDITORIAL

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Lalith Ekanayake joins me, as co-editor of IOTN, in presenting this special issue on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. We would like to thank the authors for their papers describing the results of historical and recent surveys, and an update on current research and conservation efforts in the region. ■

SEA TURTLE SURVEYS AND RESEARCH IN THE ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS

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There are many historical accounts of sea turtles in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands from the 1800s, mostly accounts of their capture and consumption by the British stationed there, or of hunting by the aboriginal communities. Mouat (1863) cites records of large numbers of turtles in Diamond Bay off the coast of Burma, and of a ship's crew capturing more than 100 turtles (probably green turtles) in 3 days. Later, Alfred Alcock, a naturalist aboard the Royal Indian Marine Survey Ship "Investigator" writes of seeing 'shoals of turtles' near South Sentinel Island, and of seeing hatchlings emerge (Alcock, 1902). Man (1883) and Portman (1899) documented the hunting culture and rituals of the Andaman indigenous tribes, emphasizing their great love of turtle meat. Similarly, Kloss (1902) recorded the presence of turtles in the Nicobars and wrote that skulls were often seen in Nicobari households.

The first surveys of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands for marine turtles were conducted in the late 1970s

by Satish Bhaskar, a pioneer of sea turtle surveys and conservation in India (see IOTN 12: 23 for a special profile of Bhaskar, including a personal account by R. Whitaker, and a compilation of his publications and surveys). Bhaskar visited the Andaman and Nicobar Islands for the first time in 1978–1979, and surveyed most islands during his eight month stint there (Bhaskar, 1979), including much of the Andamans, and Central and Great Nicobar. He returned in 1981 to survey Great Nicobar and Little Andaman Island, and in 1983–84, to visit North Andamans (summarized in Bhaskar 1993). Bhaskar revisited many of these islands during a series of surveys in the 1990s; during his last few years in the islands, he spent a substantial part of his time on South Reef Island, monitoring the hawksbill population there (Bhaskar, 1996). Bhaskar's surveys over two decades were critical in identifying many important nesting sites in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, many of which are legally protected today (see review by Namboothri et al., this issue).