

migration. These animals don't lend themselves to doing this kind of study because they live in isolated areas, they can dive to a couple of thousand metres, and it's expensive. For an NGO that has to work hard to find funding just to keep the lights on in the office, it can be a challenge. But we are cracking new ground all the time, so it's very positive.

Whale sharks were only first discovered in 1828, even though they have been around for millennia. Up till the late 1980s, there were only 320 confirmed sightings of whale sharks around the world. It's testimony to their rarity. But there's still more we don't know about them than we do. They are not out of the woods yet.

**Is it possible to say if they are recovering in any part of the world?**

Ningaloo is probably the best place in the world to study these animals because there is so much data being collected. Ningaloo Reef is bucking the trend in whale shark decline. The most recent stock assessment available using the photo-id program has shown not only has the decline stopped, but whale shark numbers have stabilized and even slightly increased – likely attributable to good management and minimal impact ecotourism. If we use a similar design, we may be able to show recovery in other parts of the globe also.

*Postscript: In May 2013, fishermen released a newborn whale shark tangled in fishing net off the coast of Gujarat, the first evidence the species may be breeding in Indian waters. ■*

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## A DEEP DIVING OLIVE RIDLEY IN THE BAY OF BENGAL

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Sea turtles are known to dive fairly deep, but the deepest dives are generally attributed to leatherback turtles who have been recorded to depths of 1000m and below (Houghton *et al.*, 2008). Not much is known about dive profiles of olive ridley turtles, but they have been recorded to dive to depths of about 150 to 200m on a regular basis (Whiting *et al.*, 2007, Macmahon *et al.*, 2007). A maximum depth of about 200m was recorded for olive ridley turtles in northern Australia (Macmahon *et al.*, 2007), but typically, dives were between 10 and 20m during inter-nesting periods and 30 to 60m post-nesting (Hamel *et al.*, 2008). In a study of sea turtles hooked in the Hawaiian long-line fishery, Polovina *et al.*, (2003) reported that olive ridleys frequently dived to 150m and below, with one dive recorded at 254m. Swimmer *et al.* (2006) also reported dive depths of over 250m for olive ridleys caught on longlines.

There is limited information about dive depths of olive ridleys turtles in the northern Indian Ocean. Two post-nesting females from Masirah Island, Oman, in the northwestern Indian Ocean, displayed dives of <40m depths (Rees *et al.*, 2012). These two animals remained

in relatively shallow waters while being tracked, and thus their dive depths were constrained by their habitat. On January 20, 2013, a photograph was taken from a Remote Operating Vehicle in the Bay of Bengal, 40-50km offshore, south of Kakinada on the Andhr Pradesh coast (east coast of India) by Paul McCaffrey (Figure 1). The photograph was taken at a depth of 225m. The information reached us via Meghan Koperski of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. This record adds to our knowledge of the poorly understood dive behaviour of the olive ridley turtle, and is the deepest dives recorded, to date, for the species in the Northern Indian Ocean.

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**Figure 1. An olive ridley at 225m depth, 40-50km offshore the Andhr Pradesh Coast**