

## Creating awareness about sea turtles at Pulicat-Pazaverkadu (North Chennai)

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The Pulicat Sanctuary, an estuary to the north of Chennai, has many migratory birds and marine organisms. There are approximately 5000 people living in over 16 fishing villages located in this area. The region is gifted with many natural attributes such as a sand barrier within the sea popularly known as the 'Saami Thittu' which prevents the trawl boats from entering into this part of the sea. The region is a breeding ground for many birds, marine organisms and olive ridley turtles.

Mating and individual turtles in the sea are often seen by fishermen in this region. With minimal population in each hamlet and not much commercial activity on the beach front, Pulicat could be preserved as a suitable habitat for turtles to nest. TREE Foundation felt the need to educate the people in this region in order to preserve the beach habitat for the future. A six member team headed by the author and members of TREE Foundation's Kadal Aamai Padhukavalargall (KAP) (Sea Turtle Protection Force) made a visit on 27<sup>th</sup> December 2006 to some of these villages in the Pulicat region and briefed the local people

about sea turtles, their significance and certain basic scientific details about the turtles and why the conservation of this endangered species is essential.

An eager and interested local public assured us that they would cooperate in any effort to save turtles as they worship turtles and do not hunt turtles or destroy their eggs. Except for a few individuals who are said to be involved in selling turtle eggs for the past ten years, others do not disturb the turtles or the eggs. The locals, the village youth and the children were requested to report on live or dead turtle and were also instructed to safeguard the turtle nests by vigilant patrolling on the beach front and keeping away miscreants from causing damage to turtle nests. The introductory visit should lead to better efforts for sea turtle conservation in the region. PLANT, a local non-government organisation working in this region for livelihood empowerment, has promised to spread awareness to children in the schools with the resource materials provided by TREE Foundation. Two youth from Sattan Kuppam and Vairan Kuppam have volunteered to be part of KAP.