

NEWS

Endangered Olive Ridley sea turtles rescued

29 Dec 2007

by Shahnaz Parveen

The Directorate of Environment officials seized two rare turtles at Tantibazar yesterday after a trader had brought them there to sell them. Two globally endangered Olive Ridley sea turtles were rescued from sellers at Taantibazar in the capital by the Department of Forest and Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh yesterday morning.

The rescued turtles were brought to the city from Patharghata, Barguna by a seller named Mamun, who had bought both of them for Tk 4,800 from local residents.

The turtles were on sale at Taantibazar for Tk 10,000 each. Two other sea turtles were sold for Tk 16,000 each recently, according to sources.

The endangered sea turtles are often sold in the city for consumption, mainly in the old town and in Farm Gate area.

The Wildlife Management and Nature Conservation Division of Forest Department filed a case under the Wildlife Act 1974 against Mamun, who was later sent to a court by police.

The rescued turtles started their journey back to a safe habitat yesterday evening.

Ishtiak Uddin Ahmed, conservator of forest, said last night, "The turtles are already on their way to Potenga beach in Chittagong. A team comprising officials of the Department of Forest and Department of Environment are transporting the turtles in a pick-up van."

Olive Ridley sea turtles are one of the five species of sea turtles found in the waters of Bangladesh. The other four species are Loggerhead turtles, Green turtles, Hawksbill turtles, and Leatherback turtles. All of these species are endangered globally. In Bangladesh they are found in the area stretching from the Sundarbans to Saint Martin's Island.

Olive Ridleys are graceful saltwater reptiles measuring up to 73cm in length, and weighing up to 45kg. Found primarily in tropical oceans and beaches, the females usually lay eggs 2 to 3 times a year, numbering up to 100 eggs in each phase. The eggs hatch after 7 to 10 weeks of laying.

In Bangladesh their breeding grounds are the Sundarbans in the southwest, and Sonadia Island, Cox's Bazar, Teknaf, and Saint Martin's Island in the southeast. They start breeding in September continuing until March -- January and February being the peak period.

These magnificent omnivorous sea creatures consume an unusual assortment of prey including fish, jellyfish, crustaceans and other shellfishes, sponges, and tunicates, they also eat sea grasses, and algae. However, they often become prey themselves.

People in the coastal belt capture the turtles when they come to beaches to lay eggs. Egg collection after the turtles leave the nests is also popular. The sea turtles require more than 7 to 9 years to attain reproductive maturity.

"People in our country are unaware of the importance of wildlife conservation. They capture these creatures to survive from poverty. They don't know anything about endangered species," said Md Anwarul Islam, chief executive of the Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh.

"The turtles are already endangered, if capturing of mature females continues, and if the eggs are taken away, the turtle population will decline sharply," he added.

"Major threats include human activities such as illegal harvesting of adults and eggs, destruction of feeding and nesting grounds, floating plastics, pollution, and incidental capturing with fishing nets," Islam said.

Injuries from collisions with boat and ship propellers are also common.

In Bangladesh, turtles are protected by national

laws and international conventions. Presently there is a ban on killing or capturing any wild animal in the country, Islam mentioned.

Moreover, Bangladesh is a signatory to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), where sea turtles are covered under Appendix I of the agreement, receiving protection from trade by all countries that signed the treaty, Islam added.

"The threats facing the sea turtles are numerous and humans are the worst threat. We urge the government to take immediate protection measures for those endangered sea turtles. Awareness building and amendments to existing laws are also necessary," he noted.

Source: <http://www.thedailystar.net>

Efforts for safe sojourn of Olive Ridleys

25 Dec 2007

By Manoj Kar

Kendrapara, Orissa: With sea erosion squeezing the space of rookeries along the Orissa coast, the forest personnel have embarked on a novel experiment to create more hospitable environs for Olive Ridley sea turtles in the run up to the arribada or mass nesting of these marine creatures.

To protect the animals from prying eyes of predating animals, the forest cover in close vicinity of the nesting ground near Habelikhati Isle is being fenced. The fencing structure would come as a buffer and would stop the animals from coming over to the nesting beaches and feast the nesting turtles.

The Habelikhati beach is free from sea erosion. Once it is made free from the predating animals, turtles would once again prefer visiting the spot for laying eggs.

About a decade back, the said beach was one of the most preferred destinations of these threatened species. But they played truant and deserted the place for their annual sojourn after casuarinas forest came up in and around the beach.

Frequent interference of animals that feasted on the

marine turtles and destroyed the eggs prompted the species to skip visit to the place.

It has become imperative to stop trespass of wild dogs, jackals, hyenas and wild boar so that the beach may again witness the unique phenomenon of arribada.

"As marauding sea continues to batter majority of existing nesting grounds along the Gahirmatha off Bay of Bengal coast turning the sandy beaches inhospitable and uncongenial for annual mass nesting of these marine creatures, we are paying utmost attention to create interference-free environs along the Habelikhati beach," said forest officials.

"We have started fencing one-km-long forest to stop animals' intrusion into the beach. The fencing work would end well in time before the annual mass nesting that was likely to occur on February-March."

The officials said that the nesting grounds near the Nasi-1 and Nasi-2 islands have been worst hit by sea erosion leaving little room for the marine visitors to dabble in egg laying spree. It's not that space is unavailable but the beaches have got truncated to accommodate the invasion of lakhs of turtles.

"The cluster of isles scattered along the Wheeler's island is being constantly battered by sea waves and sandy beaches which turtles often prefer for nesting are getting decimated almost on a daily basis."

Sea has turned violent and furious. Almost on a daily basis, the mighty tidal waves are eating into the nesting beaches. The slope and sliding characteristics of the beaches have turned topsy-turvy in major areas. The topographical features are undergoing massive changes following the sea erosion, the officials said.

"We are feeling the heat of sea erosion and rapid fragmentation of nesting beaches. Thus our emphasis is on to improve the erosion-free beaches like Habelikhati and make it hospitable for mass nesting," they said.

Source: <http://www.kalingatimes.com>

Sea turtle hatchlings released to raise awareness on climate change

14 Dec 2007

By Proditia Sabarini

Nusa Dua, Indonesia: Hundreds of tiny week-old sea turtle hatchlings swam in the wild for the first time as delegates of the ongoing climate conference released them Thursday morning at Nusa Dua beach.

The 240 hatchlings paddled their small but strong fins to swim through the light waves while barefooted delegates watched under the warm morning sun in the beach front of Melia Resort and Hotel.

Amidst the ongoing high level negotiations on climate change, non-governmental organization Conservation International and the Indonesian government released the offspring of the endangered species aiming to conserve the sea turtles and to spread awareness on the threat of climate change.

“Climate change has a direct impact on turtles in Indonesia by an increase in temperature and the destruction of turtles’ habitat,” Conservation International Marine Program Director for Conservation International, Ketut Sarjana Putra said.

The increase in temperature affects the sex ratio of turtles in the wild.

“Incubation of turtle eggs in warm temperature will produce more females. This will affect the entire reproduction cycle of turtles,” he said.

Rising sea levels, causing beaches to be inundated with sea water, as well as beach erosion, also threatens the natural nesting grounds of the turtles, he added.

According to The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, temperatures are likely to rise by between 1.1 and 6.4 degrees Celsius and sea levels by between 18 cm and 59 cm this century.

Many of Indonesia’s 17,000 islands, with beaches that are breeding habitat for sea turtles, may be swallowed up by the sea if world leaders fail to find a way to halt rising sea levels at the current climate change conference.

“There have to be adaptation programs to help this species survive,” he said.

Ketut said that around 30 percent of the released hatchlings would survive in the wild. The turtles were bred in hatcheries in Bali and East Java.

There are 134 natural grounds of green sea turtles in Indonesia, and only around 30,000 of productive nesting female sea turtle.

“They are extremely endangered,” Ketut said.

Beside the threats of climate change to habitat, sea turtle are also threatened by trapping, illegal trade and their unsustainable exploitation.

Indonesia is home to six out of seven of the world's turtle species and provides important nesting and foraging grounds, as well as important migration routes at the cross roads of the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Winner of 2007 Miss Earth Pageant, Canadian Jessica Trisko, also took part in releasing the hatchlings.

The Miss Earth pageant is an annual female event geared to promote environmental awareness and is currently one of the top three international beauty pageants in the world, after Miss Universe and Miss World.

She squatted and with awe-filled eyes she released a green sea turtle to the sea. She named the hatchling that she released Pedro.

“It’s important to take part in this kind of initiative,” she said.

“This could raise awareness of the people. By seeing this, happening in Bali, people in other communities will be inspired to do the same with other endangered species in their area.”

Source: <http://www.thejakartapost.com>

Sea turtles face threat from Indian ports plan

3 Dec 2007

By Debabrata Mohanty

One of the world's largest sea-turtle nesting beaches is facing a double development threat from industry on India's east coast.

A large port is planned either side of the main nesting site of the threatened Olive Ridley turtles in Orissa where up to 300,000 of the reptiles come ashore to lay their eggs every year.

The Olive Ridley, among the smallest of the world's seven marine turtle species, is found in the tropical and subtropical waters of the Pacific, Indian and Atlantic oceans, and swims great distances to haul itself out on to the sandy beaches of Orissa for its annual egg laying ritual.

However, over the past 13 years, more than 130,000 Olive Ridleys have been washed up dead in the area, after being caught in the nets of trawlers and gill netters. And now the species, listed as "vulnerable" by the World Conservation Union, is facing the risk of being driven from the coast completely by the proposed ports on either side of its nesting site.

Tata Steel, one of the biggest industrial companies in India, is building a £294m deepwater port at Dhamra, near a river mouth, a mere eight miles north-west of the nesting beaches of the Gahirmatha marine sanctuary. This is one of the largest nesting beaches in the world for marine turtles, with 100,000 to 300,000 nesting there every year.

On the other side of the nesting beaches, the Korean steelmaker Posco has proposed a £343m dedicated port for its 12 million-ton steel plant, 42 miles to the south.

They are big developments: the port by the Indian conglomerate is likely to have a total capacity of 83 million tons a year within 10 years while Korean steel maker's port will handle 31 million tons a year.

Conservation groups such as Operation Kachhapa and Greenpeace fear the ports would add to the existing problem of loss of suitable undisturbed breeding habitat.

The activists have singled out the Tata Steel port, given its proximity to the nesting beach and the ancillary development it would spawn. "Tata Steel's port at Dhamra would be an ecological blunder," said Sanjiv Gopal of Greenpeace India. "We recently conducted a rapid biodiversity assessment which found the presence of Olive Ridley turtles as well as the endangered crab-eating frog and the white belly mangrove snake. The results have made it clear that the project cannot go ahead, in the absence of a comprehensive and impartial environment impact assessment."

Greenpeace also referred to a satellite telemetry study by the Wildlife Institute of India in 2001 showing turtle movements near the proposed port. But thousands of them also die a gory death as they are trapped in the nets of fishing trawlers that illegally scour the coast.

"The artificial lights from anchoring vessels on Dhamra port and shore-based megaport-based industries would disrupt the breeding and nesting of the Ridleys as the hatchlings would be disoriented by artificial light," said Biswajit Mohanty of Operation Kachhapa (Sanskrit for turtle).

An expert body of the Indian Supreme Court suggested that the company and the local Orissa government should look for an alternative site.

"The routes that will be used by shipping will necessarily be through the turtle congregation areas offshore. Oil spills and sundry pollution will inevitably occur in the event of a large port being set up. It is therefore necessary that an alternative site is located for this port," the body said in response to a petition filed by a Delhi lawyer in 2003.

Source: <http://news.independent.co.uk>

Pakistan briefing highlights turtle conservation
2 Dec 2007

Water supply promised for lakes and forests

Sindh Wildlife Minister Ghulam Rasool Unar said that sufficient water would be arranged for the various lakes and forests affected by water shortages. Speaking to newsmen after a briefing held at the Sindh wildlife department, he said he had seen Haleji Lake at its peak many years back when hundreds of thousands of migratory birds used to visit this world-famous wildlife sanctuary.

“Now the water shortage has caused the lake to lose its charm both to men and waterfowl,” he said.

Talking about the fish stock, which is food for the migratory waterfowl in the sanctuary, he said many years back, while returning from his agricultural lands and passing the lake he had asked some fishermen to fetch him a few fish and within a few minutes three fish were caught, two of which were 16 kilograms each and the third one was eight kilograms. The weight and size of the fish spoke volumes about the protective measures adopted by the department staff.

The minister said the Deh Akro II wildlife sanctuary, situated among the sand dunes and which was a complex of 29 small lakes that sustained marsh crocodiles also, had also suffered owing to the water shortage.

The lake complex is fed by Jamrahu canal seepages, but some time back a new canal at a lower level had been constructed nearby to drain out the saline water from the area, and the drain was taking the water from the lakes whose condition had deteriorated.

The Pai Forest game reserve had also degraded owing to the water shortage and enhanced water supply would be ensured so that the forest could once again attract wildlife lovers and other visitors.

He said Tharparkar was once very rich in biodiversity but it had suffered over the years and now a project -- Conservation and Propagation of Biodiversity of Tharparkar -- had been developed, and it was hoped that the natural resources and

heritage like wildlife and plants would get better environment.

He said efforts would also be made to get the management plan of the Khirthar National Park approved so that this important cultural heritage site, also housing rare wildlife species of Sindh ibex, urial, etc, could be managed properly.

Mr Unnar said that efforts would be made to solve the problems of shortage of staff and overdue promotions -- with many officials serving for over 20 years in the same grade -- so that staff worked with peace of mind and could implement the protection laws.

Earlier, conservator Ghulam Rasool Channa, giving a briefing on the department's activities, said the SWD manned 47 protected sites, including a national park, 33 wildlife sanctuaries and 13 game reserves.

He said that owing to better management and protection the number of highly rare species of Sindh Ibex and Urial, which were in their hundreds in the 1970s in Khirthar National Park, had increased and at present stood at over 13,000 and 10,000, respectively. The number of Indus dolphins, an endangered species, in the Dolphin Reserve, which stood at 499 in 1999 had risen to over 820 in 2006.

The SWD official said that out of the 19 Ramsar sites (the highest status in the wetland conservation) in the country, 10 -- Haleji Lake, Keenjhar Lake, Drigh Lake, Hub Dam, Dolphin Reserve, Nurri Lagoon, Jubbo Lagoon, Run of Kutch, Indus Delta and Deh Akro II -- were in Sindh and played host to hundreds of thousands of migratory birds every year.

He said the department started its marine turtle conservation project in 1979 and so far more than 7,000 turtles had been tagged and 700,000 hatchlings released into the sea.

The department, with the assistance from the community, also introduced trophy hunting in the game reserve and in the past couple of years while on the one hand the protection of the wildlife had been enhanced with the community's help, on the

other, it had earned over \$230,000, 80 per cent of which had been given to the community for its welfare projects, concluded Mr Channa. The briefing had started over an hour and 40 minutes behind schedule owing to the late arrival of the minister.

Source: <http://www.uniquepakistan.com>

Indonesia's pollution threatens hawksbill turtles
26 Nov 2007

By Nancy-Amelia Collins

Pramuka Island, Indonesia - In December, nations will gather on the Indonesian island of Bali to discuss ways to deal with global warming and environmental damage. Indonesia is in many ways a test case for those efforts. VOA's Nancy-Amelia Collins has traveled to Pramuka Island, near Jakarta, where one man has been fighting for more than two decades to save the endangered hawksbill turtle.

The waters of Jakarta Bay are heavily polluted. Garbage dumped by the city's 12 million residents into canals that crisscross the city eventually finds its way to the sea. One study has declared the bay a "dying ecosystem."

But just an hour out of Jakarta by speedboat, the murky waters turn to clear blue sea around Pramuka Island.

Salim, 57, is trying to protect the endangered hawksbill turtle. It was once so prevalent in these waters that it was named the island's official mascot. He begins his days preparing food for the turtles.

"I'm chopping these small fish to feed to the turtles, any kind of small fish will do," he said. "We feed the turtles twice a day."

Twenty years ago the turtles laid eggs on almost all the islands here. Now their nests are found on only around 3 of the 110 islands, thanks to the pollution, and hunting.

To preserve the species, Salim collects eggs from their nests and brings them to huge water-filled

storage tanks until the turtles grow strong enough to be released to the sea.

Salim also tells the more than 20,000 people living on the six islands in the park to protect the hawksbills.

"Human beings are also a big threat to the turtles," said Salim. "People are careless. They take the eggs, and turtles also die in fishing nets. It's not eagles or big lizards, but humans who are the biggest predators of the turtles."

Even though Salim has spent his life trying to protect and preserve the turtles for future generations, experts are not optimistic the turtles will be able to survive much longer -- so close to the filth of Jakarta bay.

Source: <http://www.voanews.com>

Terengganu to see robust growth under ECER
29 Oct 2007

By R.S.N. Murali

Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia: The tourism sector will be the biggest winner in Terengganu under the East Coast Economic Region (ECER) plan.

Tourism, which has been earmarked as a key industry under the plan, can only mean a more robust economic growth for the state, which enjoys a pristine coastline, picturesque islands, scenic waterfalls, and many cultural and heritage attractions.

The ECER has underlined several strategies in the tourism industry for the entire region.

Among the strategies are:

- > DEVELOP integrated strategic tourism flagship projects;
- > ENHANCE capability building and entrepreneurship skills;
- > INTENSIFY tourism marketing and promotion programmes;
- > CREATE a strong destination brand; and
- > IMPROVE air, land and maritime infrastructure.

The plan also proposes 32 tourism development projects, including high-end hotels, motels and home-stay programmes, with an estimated

investment value of RM16bil with the capacity of generating 40,000 new jobs.

Kuala Terengganu will be conferred city status on Jan 1, and major tourism components – a marina, cruise terminal, integrated mall, entertainment centre, hotels and water sport amphitheatre – will be incorporated.

The ECER plan also recognises the importance of the conservation of the environment in order for the tourism industry to thrive.

Conservation initiatives on Terengganu Hills, Setiu Wetland state park and Kenyir Lake will be given emphasis to enhance the state's position as popular tourist destination especially in eco-tourism.

Another major conservation programme under the ECER that is seen as a major boost for the state's tourism industry is the establishment of Terengganu Global Marine Turtle Observatory (GMTO) in Rantau Abang.

GMTO is poised to be a major international research and conservation facility dedicated to the conservation of marine turtles.

Source: <http://thestar.com.my>

Kenya: Model plan for the turtle beach

20 Oct 2007

By Robin Page

Conservationists claim a proposal, backed by Naomi Campbell, could put a magical creature at risk.

Malindi- A year ago I had one of my most memorable and emotional wildlife experiences. Steve Trott, project manager of Watamu Turtle Watch on the north coast of Kenya, was looking after a green turtle that had been saved from local fishermen.

The turtle had been nursed back to health after its traumatic experience but it still looked out of sorts. Steve put a damp cloth over its shell to protect it from the sun and then took it to nearby dunes.

As we reached the top of the highest dune, the

turtle dramatically came back to life, transformed by the sound and smell of surf. Steve took the turtle down to the crystal-clear water, where it skimmed off to freedom.

Turtles are beautiful and bizarre creatures which have been around for up to 200 million years. The north Kenyan coast boasts five species: the green, hawksbill, Olive Ridley, leatherback and loggerhead.

The first three nest in the marine national parks at Watamu and Malindi, but the future of these rare creatures is under threat.

Pollution, loss of habitat, illegal and industrial fishing have all been blamed but conservationists now allege that the turtles face a new threat: a proposed hotel development backed by Naomi Campbell.

The model and her former boyfriend, Flavio Briatore, head of Renault's Formula 1 team, want to build an exclusive six-star "billionaires' resort" in Malindi. The £11 million project would be located on the site of the Jambo Village Hotel, which is in ruins and in a built-up area.

Conservationists claim that turtles use the adjacent beach as a nesting site and would be disturbed by the development - "absolute nonsense", according to Campbell. Briatore, too, denies that the adjacent beach is a nesting area for turtles.

There is no question that Campbell, who is a regular and popular visitor to Malindi, loves the coastal region, telling its residents in an interview this summer: "You have fabulous beaches and the people here are just amazingly nice. But something needs to be corrected to attract big-time investors."

To her credit she is also keen to create local jobs, as well as a school in Nairobi for Kenyan models. But her latest venture has undoubtedly upset the wildlife lobby. At the heart of the dispute is the nesting behaviour of the turtles.

Females advance up the beach to well above the high-water mark to lay their 120 eggs and cover them with sand.

After 60 days, the young hatchlings need a still,

starlit night to cross the sand back to the sea, often guided by the reflection of the moon on the water. Sadly, many new hotels build a wall at the high-water mark (where the marine park ends), preventing turtles from reaching their nesting sites.

And even if they manage to find a way back to the sea, they are disorientated by noise and follow bright lights, rather than the moon.

Dr Pierino Liana is the local representative of Flavio Briatore's Lion Group, which already owns one luxury residence in Malindi.

He disagrees that the turtle population will be damaged. "We are aware of the interest in the turtles and already contribute to them.

"The new project will not be large - 15 luxury apartments, a small hotel and a club house containing a gym and beauty centre.

"The development will employ 400 local people and it will be of a high quality with a low impact. We think the problems have been exaggerated. The planning process has not started yet, but we would hope to be in business in 2010."

The development has been met with qualified support from some locals. Anna Blunt, an artist from one of Kenya's oldest expat families, says: "I am generally for progress and development, as long as it's done with consideration for the environment.

"Development is inevitable and I would prefer a more exclusive type of tourism than cheapie accommodation for Europeans on beer-swilling holidays in the sun."

Steve Trott, however, is dismayed, claiming that any new development could not only destroy the natural environment but might also erode local social and cultural values: "Malindi marine park and reserve have reached saturation point as far as commercial tourism is concerned. New developments are turning the coastline to concrete."

Unfortunately, the turtles face dangers out at sea, too.

Neither Kenya, Somalia or Tanzania have fishery protection vessels and as a result their fisheries are being plundered. Japanese, Korean and Taiwanese boats are long-lining for yellowfin tuna, using lines tens of miles long with a hook every yard.

Hooking a turtle is an inconvenience for the fishermen. To free the hook they simply cut the turtle's head off. EU countries are there too, helping to deplete Africa's fish stocks; their nets are simply drowning turtles.

No one doubts that Kenya's turtles need help - a high profile celebrity, perhaps, to fight their corner. And who better than Naomi Campbell?

Source: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk>