

## Sea turtle conservation in Uttara Kannada, India

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Uttara Kannada has a coastline of about 170 km between Karwar to the north and Bhatkal to the south. All along this coast, the beach is divided by hillocks that reach the sea. Few beaches are devoid of human settlement, and in Karwar, the beach has been reduced because of developmental activities taken up by the Indian Navy.

During 2006-2007, the Canara Green Academy conducted a survey to locate sea turtle nesting beaches. Coastal villages between Bhatkal and Kumta and also between Gangavali and Belekeri in Ankola were visited to collect information on sea turtle nesting. Some important potential nesting beaches were identified; the main villages are Talmakki and Bailoor near Murdeshwar, Apsarakonda near Honavar, Haldipur and Dhareshwar between Honavar and Kumta, Baad-Kagal in Kumta and Gokarna-Gangavali beaches.

In all these areas, the olive ridley nests most frequently, and the main nesting season is from October to January. The eggs are consumed and turtle meat is also sold in the fish market. It was felt that raising the awareness of local villagers was of utmost importance. Field workers were

employed to conduct group meetings and door to door awareness campaigns. Pamphlets were distributed and large billboards were erected in the villages near nesting beaches. These campaigns were conducted from October to January which is the main nesting season along this coast.

The campaign started to yield results from the month of November. Phone calls from villagers about the poaching of sea turtles started to arrive. Our field level workers then went to these villages to collect the eggs from the poachers. The Karnataka Forest Department officials are also helping in this activity. Combining our efforts has had good results in these areas between Bhatkal and Gokarna-Gangavali.

Canara Green Academy has set up sea turtle hatcheries at Apsarkonda, Dhareshwar and Kadle in association with the Karnataka Forest Department, and maintains the hatchery at Gangavali established by Sri Anand Udar, the earlier Range Forest Officer of Hiregutti. All the eggs collected from the poachers are relocated at these hatcheries. A total of 2939 eggs have been collected during this year.

**Table 1:** Collection of nests for hatcheries along the Uttara Kannada coast

Sl.No.	Name of the hatchery	No. of nests	No. of eggs collected
1	<i>Apsarakonda</i>	9	846
2	<i>Dharieshear</i>	6	704
3	<i>Kadle/Holangadde</i>	7	712
4	<i>Gangavali</i>	8	677
	<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>2939</b>

All the collections thus far are from poachers. The eggs that remain undisturbed by poachers are not even provided protection. Sea turtle nesting is sporadic in these areas and hence in-situ protection is difficult and costly. The eggs collected from poachers may not have high hatching success as they may have been collected a day or two after

nesting; recovery of eggs from poachers may be one or two days after collection; some of the eggs are recovered from fish markets and handling may affect development. Despite these caveats, at least some hatchlings will emerge from these nests and it is hoped that our efforts will reduce the incidence of poaching.