

Special Profile: Satish Bhaskar

Kartik Shanker

Satish Bhaskar is a pioneer of sea turtle biology and conservation in India. Satish conducted the first surveys in the Andaman and Nicobar islands, the Lakshadweep, in Orissa and in fact, most parts of the mainland coast of India. His surveys and sojourns on many uninhabited islands in Andaman, Nicobar and Lakshadweep provided the first (and in some cases, only) information on sea turtle nesting on these beaches. His published and unpublished reports have formed the basis for current sea turtle conservation initiatives and it is thanks to his data that interventions were made possible to protect beaches in the Andaman Islands which were otherwise slated for tourism development.

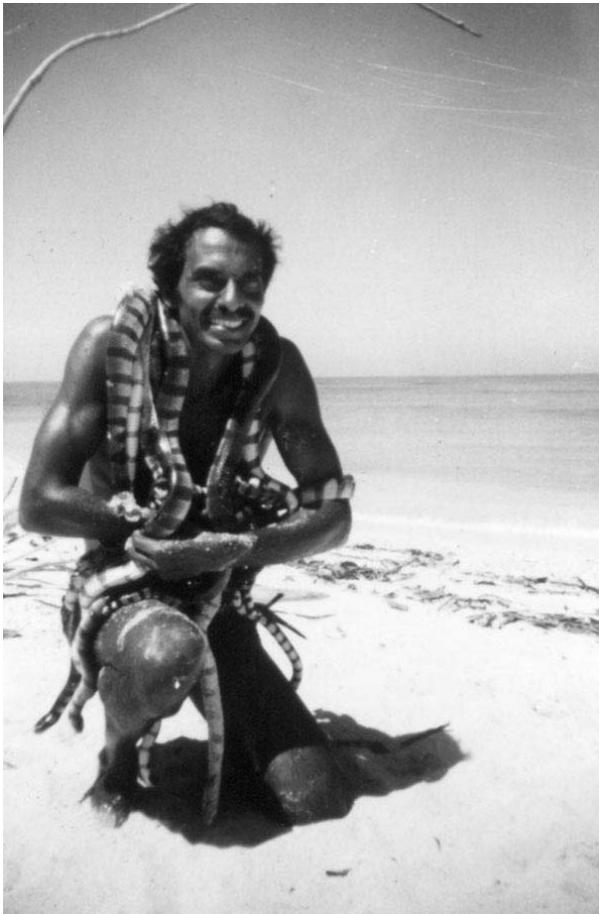


Photo: After punching tags on several sea kraits' tails, Satish was sure they were incapable of biting people! Photo courtesy: Atma Reddy / Hufreesh Dumasia

Satish started with a survey of the Gulf of Mannar, Tamil Nadu in 1977. In 1978, He visited the Lakshadweep and surveyed several islands. He then surveyed the coast of Gujarat, and later that year, visited the Andamans for the first time. Over the next few years he would survey most of the mainland coast of India, including the states of Kerala, Goa, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. In 1982, he revisited the Lakshadweep islands, spending several weeks alone on an uninhabited island. In 1984-85, he spent some months in West Papua, then Irian Jaya, and was the first outsider to visit some of the villages on that coast; he was of course the first to survey Jamursba Medi and Wermon beaches. In the early 1990s, Satish focused his work on the Andamans and monitored the hawkbill population on South Reef Island for several years.

In 2000-01, the Wildlife Institute of India coordinated a large UNDP-funded project on sea turtle conservation in India. Sea turtle surveys were conducted in every state by different institutions. Remarkably, in most instances, these surveys provided the first update on Satish's original work done a decade or two before. Satish and CS Kar from the Orissa Forest Department attended the first world conference on sea turtles. Kar and Bhaskar's paper in the *Biology and Conservation of Sea Turtles* (edited by Karen Bjorndal) serves as a comprehensive and still relevant account of sea turtles in south Asia. Satish was an intrepid explorer and untrained biologist, but inspired a generation of researchers and conservationists. He has set a so far unmatched example of tireless, passionate effort to fill our huge gaps of knowledge in sea turtle status, distribution and biology in India.

He retired a few years ago and is no longer active, but deserves to be recognised for his lasting impact on sea turtle biology and conservation in the region and beyond. In April 2010, the International Sea Turtle Society awarded its annual Sea Turtle Champions Award to Satish *in recognition of his pioneering surveys and research on sea turtles in South and Southeast Asia.*

In this profile, we include a tribute to Satish from Rom Whitaker and Janaki Lenin, a list of his publications, and a list of his surveys.