

Students' Sea Turtle Conservation Network Tamil Nadu

Background of the organisation:

The Students' Sea Turtle Conservation Network (SSTCN) was formed, and established its first hatchery, in December 1988. Tito Chandy and Arif Razack were the original founders, and were joined shortly thereafter by Tharani Selvam, Kartik Shanker, Yohan Thiruchelvam, and Tara Thiagarajan. Satish Bhaskar, one of India's pioneering sea turtle biologists was based in Madras from 1988 to 1991 and mentored the students and worked for the SSTCN during the 1989-90 season. Others, such as Romulus Whitaker and Harry Andrews of the Madras Crocodile Bank also provided support.

Sea turtle conservation began in 1971, when a few dedicated wildlife enthusiasts began walking the beaches of Chennai to document the status of and threats to sea turtles. Amongst these were S. Valliapan and Romulus Whitaker, the founder of both the Madras Snake Park and the Madras Crocodile Bank. From 1982 to 1988, the Forest Department set up several hatcheries along the Tamil Nadu coast, three near Madras (now Chennai) and two near Nagapattinam. The closing of hatcheries and conservation programme by the Forest Department in 1988 resulted in SSTCN being born.

The SSTCN has mainly been organised and operated

by students from colleges and even schools and a few young working adults. Once students finish courses, they routinely leave Chennai after participating in or leading the organisation for two to three years, so the SSTCN has seen a high turnover of both membership and leadership.

One of the main motives in taking up this activity by SSTCN was to save nests from poaching. The objectives were always two fold: conservation and awareness creation. The idea was to use the context of the plight of the turtles to highlight the state of the environment.

Where we work:

We cover a total of about 7 km along the stretch of beach from Neelankarai in the south up to the Adyar estuary along the Chennai coast. Since 2009, we have also been covering the entire stretch of Marina beach (approximately 15 km), from the Adyar estuary up to Napier's bridge.

Activities:

Our activities include beach monitoring, relocating nests found on our stretch of beach, hatchery management, and education and awareness campaigns; the programme has continued from 1988



until the present. Each season, the group establishes a hatchery, and every night from end-December through mid-April, the same 7.5 km stretch of beach is patrolled. From this year the additional stretch of 6.5 km covering the Marina beach up to the Cooum, has also been taken up for patrolling and nest relocation, and a new hatchery has been set up for this purpose.

Support for the organisation:

SSTCN has always been working only with student volunteers. As a result expenses have been very low. The hatchery is made with low cost bamboo slats and is reused for up to five years. Only in the last few years we have been paying a person from the fishing community to supervise the hatchery. This year we have employed a couple of people to monitor the stretch from the Adyar estuary up to the Cooum. As costs are minimal, we are able to easily raise funds from a few friends and well wishers.

Plans for the future:

We plan to build on the existing outreach activities to create more awareness and work towards positive solutions. Also, we liaise with other similar minded

conservation groups to synergise energies, share volunteers, and create positive contexts for interested people to participate, and we plan to expand these to greater levels.

Role within the network:

We participate in combined research work, learn from each other's experiences, draw energy from groups working with similar objectives, share data, participate, and work towards creating a strong voice to talk on behalf of turtles effectively.

Contributed by Akila Balu, SSTCN.

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TREE Foundation
Tamil Nadu

Background of the organisation:

TREE Foundation (Trust for Environment Education, Conservation and Community Development) is a non-governmental organisation founded by Dr. Supraja Dharini in 2002, inspired and guided by Dr. Jane Goodall, and driven by compassion and care for the welfare of all animals, the environment and communities.

TREE Foundation involves the fishing community youth (Sea Turtle Protection Force - STPF) in a sea turtle protection and conservation programme in South

India. TREE Foundation, along with the permission and support of the Wildlife Wing of the Forest Department, identified the need for a similar programme to be extended to the entire southeast coast of India.

Educating and creating awareness at the community level is an integral part of our conservation programme. Community acceptance and involvement has undoubtedly been the most important factor in the success of our conservation programmes over the past eight years. TREE Foundation is committed to the sustainable and continued future of the programme.