

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.

In conjunction with our community education programmes, TREE Foundation has developed and implemented awareness and training programmes for officials of the Environment and Forest and Fisheries Departments, Indian Coast Guard and Marine Police. Designed to standardise data collection and conservation protocols for sea turtle and marine mammals, these programmes will eventually be implemented in all coastal areas of India to build a nationwide network of officials sharing common goals of conservation.

Objectives:

TREE Foundation focuses on developing an eco-aware society ensuring harmonious co-existence with all life forms. The Foundation also aims to establish partnerships with local education institutions and decision-makers to disseminate findings and encourage more effective conservation policy through participatory workshops, curriculum development, and knowledge exchanges with conservationists.

Our primary mission is to protect the fragile marine eco-system of India and educate people to conserve all life forms. We strongly believe in the land-ocean connection, in that if people are the problem, then they are the solution. Successful conservation requires a multi-disciplinary approach, where communities and livelihoods are not excluded but instead empowered, thereby facilitating the base for effective change.

Where we work:

TREE Foundation is based in Chennai. Our activities are carried out along the coast of Chennai and Kancheepuram in Tamil Nadu and Nellore in Andhra Pradesh.

Activities:

In view of our objectives, TREE Foundation aims to address marine conservation by focusing on the following:

Sea turtle conservation: Using the olive ridley as a flagship species to address marine conservation issues with the fishing community, Department of Fisheries, Department of Wildlife and the general public, TREE Foundation's community based sea turtle conservation

work has and would further enhance efforts to recover turtle populations along the South Indian coastline and promote community involvement in conservation through training and stewardship opportunities.

While we were conducting sea turtle conservation programmes, we discovered other protected marine wildlife was being poached. Therefore, the scope of the outreach programmes has widened to include all protected marine species.

Community members, many of whom were egg poachers, are encouraged to consider sea turtle nest monitoring as a professional alternative livelihood. The programme continues to partner with coastal communities interested in assuming greater responsibility for sea turtle survival in southeast India, by facilitating beach patrols and the development of outreach materials.

TREE Foundation pioneered a successful community based conservation programme for the endangered olive ridley sea turtles nesting along the south eastern coast of India. TREE also initiated the sea turtle conservation community based programme in 2002 for fishers of 5 fishing villages, covering 13 km of the coast to protect nesting female turtles, their eggs and to reduce turtle mortality.

The olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) nests on the southeast Indian coast (in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh), and juvenile hawksbill turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) and green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*), forage in the coastal waters of the area. However, no conservation measures had been initiated in the 110 km of Kancheepuram coast and 32 km stretch in Nellore (Andhra Pradesh) to where TREE Foundation has now expanded. Until 2008, local communities were unaware of the protection laws and importance of the turtles in the coastal marine ecosystem in these areas.

Community development: In helping to evolve a symbiotic and harmonious co-existence with nature and to develop self reliance among the community by identifying them as responsible key stakeholders in the resource, TREE seeks to facilitate sustained commitment to conservation goals by fostering capacity for livelihood diversification and income-generation.

Environment education: TREE's environment education programme is focused on fisher-folk and students in schools and colleges in India, specifically along the east coast of India to improve environmental awareness and literacy.

TREE Roots & Shoots Eco Groups (A Dr. Jane Goodall Volunteer Network Program):

The TREE Roots & Shoots programme helps connect students through education, volunteering and communication to expand the member network for a wider reach and effective movement towards biodiversity conservation in India.

In addition to the above activities, TREE Foundation has also been the first non-governmental organisation to perform the satellite tagging of sea turtles, with technical expertise provided by Dr. Tony Tucker. TREE Foundation also carries out rescue and rehabilitation of sea turtles and marine mammals and conducts necropsy when necessary. TREE is also involved in the study of Indo-Pacific humpback dolphins.

A brief profile of the Foundation's activities between 2009 and 2010 is given below:

Where we work:

TREE Foundation is based in Chennai. Our activities are carried out along the coast of Chennai and Kancheepuram in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh with plans to expand our programmes nationwide.

Support for the organisation:

TREE is supported by the Trustees' personal funds, properties and well wishers. The Wildlife Wing of the Forest Department (Tamil Nadu) has supported the Sea Turtle Protection Force since 2006 with a stipend provided to members of the Force during the turtle nesting period. The Wildlife Wing of the Forest Department (Andhra Pradesh) has also supported the STPF from 2009 onwards. The National Biodiversity Authority of India has supported the annual Flipper Fest from 2007 onwards. Supraja Dharini has also received awards from the Whitley Fund for Nature for the year 2009 and grants from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund, Peoples Trust for Endangered Species, Conservation Fund and Oak Foundation for Environment Awareness, Community Outreach and Sea Turtle Conservation Programs from 2010.

Activity	Duration	Objectives	Outcomes
Teachers Conference (annual)	1 day	To get teachers involved in conservation awareness programmes.	76 teachers from various schools in Chennai participated.
Flipper Fest (annual)	2 days	To spread awareness on marine biodiversity conservation to students.	1,100 students from 21 schools and 7 colleges participated.
Coastal Clean Up day (annual)	2 hours	To instill responsibility for reducing litter generation on beaches in Chennai and surrounding areas.	People who took part included 16 fishing villages in cleaning 14 tonnes of garbage from the beaches in front of their villages.
Youth Summit - Eco Revolution (annual)	2 days	To involve and initiate students in to conservation, community and environment awareness activities and to form Roots & Shoots Eco Groups.	123 students participated and 23 students joined as Roots & Shoots members and took part in various TREE Foundation activities during 2010.
Community based sea turtle conservation*	5 months	To initiate sustained community based sea turtle conservation.	30 villages participated in the conservation programme and released more than 12,000 olive ridley hatchlings to sea.

*Conducted jointly with the Wildlife Wing of the Forest Department, Department of Fisheries and the Indian Coast Guard.



Plans for the future:

We aim to set up an institute for research and conservation to expand our current activities. We are currently pursuing further collaborations on projects and activities. We have also recently co-founded BEACON (Bay of Bengal Ecologists and Conservation Network) with field workers along the Bay of Bengal in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka for better conservation management in the Bay of Bengal region, with a special focus on marine mega fauna.

In association with the Department of Environment and Forests and Indian Coast Guard in the respective states, we will conduct prohibited marine species awareness workshops for Forest, Fisheries, Coast Guard and Marine Police for all the coastal states of India.

Role within the network:

In being an active member of the TAG network, we would like to share information whole heartedly with all members of the network. We would like to initiate a Turtle Recovery Program for the Indian coast with the participation and involvement of all members of TAG. With local TAG members from Vishakhapatnam

(VISAKA SPCA) and Gujarat (Prakruti Nature Club) TREE Foundation has developed a network to jointly provide expertise on scientific methods necessary for turtle conservation (satellite tagging, flipper tagging, hatcheries management, biopsy sampling, necropsy procedures, data recording and standardisation), resource material design and development and to conduct prohibited marine species awareness workshops for officials and communities in the respective states. The first batch of STPFs from Chennai are the resource persons for training STPFs in these areas.

Contributed by Supraja Dharini, Founder – Trustee and Chairperson, TREE Foundation.

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