

HOW IT ALL STARTED!

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Many ideas and projects have their origins in chance events. In 1998, one of us (KS) attended the 18th Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation at Mazatlan, Mexico, and inspired by the fraternal spirit of that community, felt compelled to network with the sea turtle community in India. A year earlier, the Marine Turtle Specialist Group had conducted the Northern Indian Ocean Regional Meeting on sea turtles in Bhubaneswar, Orissa, bringing together many sea turtle biologists and conservationists in the region, and luminaries and experts from outside such as Jack Frazier, Frank Paladino, Neca Marcovaldi, Pam Plotkin, Colin Limpus and Charles Tambaiah. The time seemed ripe for bringing people together, and keeping in touch through a local publication.

By good fortune, a project called Operation Kachhapa was launched in 1999, focusing on conservation of olive ridley sea turtles in Orissa. With support from this project, in particular its leader Belinda Wright, we started a newsletter called *Kachhapa* in 1999 with the objective of spreading awareness about sea turtle conservation and management in South Asia. We took inspiration from the Marine Turtle Newsletter (MTN), initiated in the 1970s by Nicholas Mrosovsky and an extraordinary resource in the global sea turtle community. Over the next few years, the newsletter carried articles on sea turtle projects and status updates from all over India, and from Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

From the very beginning, *Kachhapa* aimed to be inclusive of issues such as fisheries and livelihoods, with the second issue including a contribution on the status of Indian fisheries by Thomas Kocheri, then head of the National Fishworkers Forum. Also notable were editorials by Jack Frazier on sea turtles as the oceans' ambassadors of conservation, Neca Marcovaldi on sea turtle conservation in Brazil, Nicholas Mrosovsky on considering sustainable use in Orissa to aid both people and turtles, Matthew Godfrey and Miguel Pedrono on reintroduction of marine turtles, and Nick Pilcher on combining modern methods and traditional management.

In 2005, we broke away from Operation Kachhapa and recast the publication as the Indian Ocean Turtle Newsletter (IOTN) and its focus widened to cover the entire Indian Ocean region. With an expanded editorial board (including CS as co-editor from 2008), and an advisory board comprising representatives from most Indian Ocean and South-east Asian countries, IOTN aimed to reach not just academics, students and NGOs, but government officers in various sectors. The hard copy newsletter now has a distribution list of about 1,200 (with a peak of 1,500 in 2010), and is intended to reach an audience that is unlikely to access this information on the internet.

From 2005 to 2011, the IOTN has addressed many important issues, including the contentious Dhamra Port in Orissa. In 2008, the newsletter published (jointly with the MTN) a series of articles and perspectives from various stakeholders and observers on the construction of a port at Dhamra, which is adjacent to the olive ridley mass nesting beach at Gahirmatha. The IOTN also published bibliographies on sea turtles for India (with separate bibliographies for Orissa and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands) and Sri Lanka. Updates on projects and profiles of NGOs were periodically published. The geographical extent increased dramatically, including articles from Indonesia and Australia to the east, to Kenya and Tanzania to the west. In 2010, the IOTN carried a special issue (edited by Stephane Ciccione and Jerome Bourjea) on sea turtles in the western Indian Ocean.

IOTN makes another important transition in 2012, bringing on Andrea Phillott as the editor of the newsletter, along with several new members of the editorial board. We are confident that Andrea will bring a new vision and fresh perspective to the newsletter and expand its horizons even further. Finally, as outgoing co-editors, we would like to express our gratitude to those who have supported us over the years—for your advice, your contributions, your manuscripts and your readership. As we pass the mantle on, we believe that this encouragement and support is critical to achieving the goals of the IOTN. ■