

## **An update on Sahyadri Nisarga Mitra activities during 2007-2008**

**Bhau Katdare**

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### **Sea turtles**

At Sahyadri Nisarga Mitra, we started the 'Marine Turtle Conservation Project' six years ago in Maharashtra. In 2007-2008, we have undertaken conservation and protection work at 30 villages in coastal Maharashtra and arranged awareness campaigns along the entire coastline of the state. A total of 159 turtle nests were protected and more than 3000 hatchlings were released during 2007-08. In the last six years, a total of 371 nests were protected and more than 13000 hatchlings were released safely into the sea. For the last three years, we have granted the 'Kasav Mitra Puraskar' (Turtle Friend Award) to individuals and organisations in recognition of outstanding work carried out for sea turtle conservation. In 2008, the award was given to Dr. Ramdas Mahajan from Kolthare (Dapoli taluk, Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra). A Gujarati translation of the book 'Sagari Kasav' (Sea Turtles) by Parthiv Sanghavi was also produced in 2008.

Over the last two years, we have organised an annual turtle festival at Velas village in Ratnagiri district, Maharashtra, in collaboration with the forest department and Gram panchayat of Velas. The main aim of this festival is to encourage the involvement of local communities in turtle conservation activities. Our attempt is also to increase the income of local people by encouraging their participation in the festival. Nature lovers, tourists and visitors from various parts of Maharashtra and neighboring states attend the festival. Nearly 250 visitors comprising of housewives, school and college students, doctors, engineers, journalists, photographers, social workers, nature researchers and teachers attended the festival in 2008. A cricket tournament 'Kasav Chashak' was also arranged at Velas and Kolthare.

This encouraged the participation and involvement of the youth of the area.

Under a proposal that was accepted by the Maharashtra Forest Department for carrying out activities for the conservation of marine turtles and vultures in the area, two district level training programmes were conducted by our organization for the staff of the Ratnagiri and Raigad District Forest Departments. The training programme included lectures, slide shows and film screenings.

### **Mangroves**

In 2008, we carried out activities under the 'Mangrove Project'. Activities included arranging of slide shows, lectures, film screenings and photography and poster exhibitions in the coastal villages of Dabhol creek, to increase awareness about mangroves. Students from 25 Zilla Parishad (District Council) primary schools and 5 high schools participated in the events. We also organised a painting contest for school students at Dabhol and Kolthare in Ratnagiri district. A village meeting to create awareness about mangrove ecology was also organised at Anjarla.

### **Awards**

In the year 2007-2008, our organisation was honored with the following awards:

- 'Prani-Paxi Sahayak Puraskar' presented to Bhau Katdare by Radhabai Hardikar of the Pranijat Mangal Sanstha in October, 2007.
- 'Jiwhala Gaurav Puraskar' presented to Bhau Katdare by the Jiwhala Super Market in December, 2007.
- 'Vasundhara Mitra' presented to Bhau Katdare at the Vasundhara International Film Festival at Pune in March, 2008.

### Plans for the year 2008 – 2009

Our current plans are:

- To establish Vulture Conservation Centres
- To extend activities of the marine turtle conservation along the entire coastline of Maharashtra and specific protection activities to a minimum of 50 locations.
- To carry out *in situ* conservation of marine turtles at 10 locations.

- To establish a ‘Student Nature Club’ to increase awareness and encourage participation of school students in the area.
- To carry out awareness programmes for mangrove conservation.

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### Conservation of sea turtles in Kachchh on the western coast of Gujarat

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In continuation of the earlier note (see Meena *et al.*, 2007) on sea turtle hatcheries in Kachchh, Gujarat (Figure 1), the efforts made thereafter have been geared primarily towards increasing public awareness for the conservation of sea turtles (Figure 2). A flag hoisting ceremony conducted on Republic Day, 26<sup>th</sup> January 2007 at Mandvi-Kutch attracted considerable attention. The theme of the ceremony was that sea turtles are our guests and they should be welcome on Mandvi coast. Such awareness

programmes have encouraged support to forest officials by the local community in conservation activities, for example, conserving turtle eggs along the coast. The Hon’ble Chief Minister Shri Narendra Modi inaugurated the newly constructed sea turtle hatchery at Mandvi on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2007 and applauded the conservation efforts that were being carried out. Such encouragement has boosted the enthusiasm of the local community and field foresters to conserve this endangered species.



**Figure 1:** Sea turtle hatchery in Kachchh, Gujarat.