

RESOURCE OF INTEREST



ANNUAL REPORTS ON SEA TURTLES IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA

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The Marine Turtle Specialist Group (MTSG) is one of the many Specialist Groups and Task Forces that make up the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)- Species Survival Commission (SSC). Past MTSG projects have included the Burning Issues meetings and publications (<https://www.iucn-mtsg.org/burning-issues>) and IUCN Red List Assessments (<https://www.iucn-mtsg.org/red-list-assessments>).

In 2017, MTSG launched a new- and ambitious- initiative: annual Regional Reports (<https://www.iucn-mtsg.org/regional-reporting>), with the aim to compile key knowledge about sea turtles at the national and regional scale that would help MTSG answer specific questions and complete tasks such as Red List Assessments. The Regional Vice-Chairs (RVCs) were tasked with the responsibility of acting as report Editors and soliciting chapters from as many countries and territories as possible in their region. The report Editors invited MTSG Members or others with national expertise to prepare individual chapters for each country. Published and other known information was first collected in an Excel workbook comprising several spreadsheets, then summarised and explained in written text. Although there was a steep learning curve for Editors and Chapter Authors alike, the process, using data codes and standard entry format, means that updating a chapter in subsequent years will be relatively simple.

The first MTSG Annual Regional Reports- including the report for the Middle East and South Asia- were released in 2018. Phillott & Rees (2018) included chapters for seven (Egypt, India, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Yemen) of the 17 countries in the region. Those country chapters were updated and chapters for four new countries (Bahrain, Djibouti, Maldives, Sudan) were included in the 2019 report (Phillott & Rees, 2019).

Each chapter summarises known information about the biology, monitoring and conservation of sea turtles in the country and thus highlights important knowledge gaps, and together present available information about 11 sea turtle Regional Management Units (RMUs; see Wallace *et al.*, 2010) in the Middle East and South Asia.

The information gathered for all species for the regional reports corroborates findings of the recent regional MTSG red listing of green turtles *Chelonia mydas* in the North Indian Ocean (Mancini *et al.*, 2019). There is a fundamental need to generate basic data such as annual nest counts in order to fully assess and firmly establish population trends in the region, which will highlight areas for additional conservation measures.

The MTSG Regional Reports will be a stimulating read for anyone interested in the biology and conservation of sea turtles and their habitats. Their greatest value probably lies in the chapter for each country providing the best references and a summary about the distribution, abundance and trends at nesting sites and in marine areas, biological data, threats in terrestrial and marine environments, conservation actions, and other research conducted for each RMU; the Regional Overview condenses all such information for each RMU in the region. The summaries and references will be a significant aid for those conducting Red List Assessments, or researchers looking for sources of information not included in online databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, Scopus and similar.

As Editors of both the 2018 and 2019 reports, and Authors contributing to chapters about sea turtles in five of the region's countries, we have personal experience of the amount of time that MTSG Members

and other contributors give to this initiative. However, such a time commitment is only required the first time a country chapter is written; updating chapters in subsequent years requires considerably less time. IOTN readers in the Middle East and South Asia could assist in the annual revision process by sending recent papers and reports to the chapter authors or report editors for inclusion. We hope to include chapters for countries that have not yet been reported on in the near future, and welcome assistance in making this happen.

Literature cited:

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