

TRACING THE MIGRATION OF THE INDIAN MARINE TURTLES: TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED AND COLLABORATIVE CONSERVATION PROGRAM

Madras Crocodile Bank Trust (MCBT), Tamil Nadu

The project aims to carry out monitoring and networking for sea turtles at select sites along the coast of India.

Project Update – March 2005

A. Gujarat

Project partner: Gujarat Institute of Desert Ecology, Bhuj

Gujarat has important green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) and olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) nesting grounds. Monitoring was initiated at index beaches as part of the CMS project and will continue till March, 2005. Two workshops were conducted for the forest department staff at Kachchh and Porbandar. Workshops were also conducted for NGOs in Amrili and Jamnagar. Permission has been received from the Ministry of Environment and Forests and the Gujarat Forest Department to initiate tagging and tissue sample collection. Tags and applicators were received from the Madras Crocodile Bank Trust to initiate this programme.

B. Maharashtra and Goa

Project partner: Bombay Natural History Society, Mumbai

In Maharashtra, the nesting season is from October to March and there are reports of sporadic nesting of olive ridley turtles from the entire coast. In 2004, a 50 km stretch of less populated beaches near Malwan in Sindhudurg district was monitored. But few nests were reported. This year, local resource persons monitored the beaches near Velas in Ratnagiri district. In all 29 nests were protected in this area.

The first state level workshop on sea turtles was conducted in Chiplun Maharashtra. This workshop was attended by 55 participants including locals from all the five coastal villages and officials from Forest Department. It was unanimously decided to start a Central Sea Turtle Conservation Centre at Chiplun. The main work of this forum was to collect and disseminate the data regarding the sea turtles of Maharashtra. This will also try and raise the funds for the future work. From this year, a new award was instituted, called “Kasav Mitra” (friend of sea turtles) to the person doing work in sea turtle conservation. This year it was given to Mr. Nandu Patil, a village leader of Velas, Maharashtra for his contribution in the last three years.

With the help of Sahyadri Nisarga Mitra (SNM), a NGO involved in this project, a sea turtle manual in Marathi (local language) is under preparation and will be published as soon as funding is available.

In Goa, monitoring is being carried by the Forest Department and by an independent researcher. Awareness campaigns were carried out by collaborating NGO, Green Cross along the coast during breeding season. The permission for tagging and tissue collection is still awaited for both states and will be initiated as soon as permission is obtained.

C. Tamil Nadu and Kerala

Project partner: Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Coimbatore

Tamil Nadu and Kerala have important olive ridley nesting beaches and Gulf of Mannar is an important feeding area for all five species of sea turtles found in Indian waters. Monitoring was initiated at index beaches as part of the CMS project, and will continue till March, 2005. Monitoring was being carried out at sites in Tamil Nadu and Kerala in collaboration with local NGOs. Workshops were planned for the forest department staff and NGOs, but have been postponed due to the tsunami. Preliminary post tsunami assessments of the nesting beaches are being carried out.

D. Andaman and Nicobar Islands

Project partner: Andaman and Nicobar Environmental Team, Port Blair

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands have important feeding and nesting populations of leatherback turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*), hawksbill turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), green turtles, and olive ridley turtles. As part of the CMS project, monitoring was continued at one site in the Andamans at Cuthbert Bay, and at one site in the Nicobar, Galathea on Great Nicobar Island. Monitoring and tagging has been on-going at Galathea from 2000. The tsunami destroyed the ANET camp at Galathea, and the researcher, Ambika Tripathy is not believed to have survived. The only survivor from the camp, Saw Aghue (who has worked with ANET for several years) was rescued after more than 10 days. Harry Andrews, Director, MCBT, has been carrying out post tsunami surveys in the Andaman and Nicobar islands.