

## Olive Ridley Hatchery Program of Point Calimere Wildlife Sanctuary, Tamil Nadu

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Olive Ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) is one of the five marine turtles found in the Indian waters. The Olive Ridley and 4 other marine turtles is listed under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and in Annexure-I of CITES.

Nesting of Olive Ridley turtles have been observed along the beach of Point Calimere Wildlife Sanctuary, Tamil Nadu for many years. The late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had initiated a conservation program for olive ridley sea turtles in 1982 under which an artificial hatchery was set up in the sanctuary. Dr. Abdul Rahman, Thanjavur had run the hatchery for the incubation and release of hatchlings. The program was, however, discontinued in '87 due to lack of funding. In January 1999 it was decided to revive the conservation effort and accordingly a field study on "Nesting Ecology of Olive Ridley" was conducted by the sanctuary biologist P. Sathiyaselvam. The major finding of the study was that hatching failure was primarily due to predation by jackals, wild boars, mongooses and brahminy kites. Based on the findings of the study, an artificial hatchery was set up in the sanctuary in January 2000. The hatchery was fortified with chain link fence all around and zinc sheets driven into the ground along the periphery to prevent damage by wild boars, mongooses, snakes and jackals. The hatchery was fully covered with fishing nets to

prevent predation by raptors, mostly brahminy and pariah kites. A temporary shed was also erected inside the hatchery for monitoring and vigil.

With the commencement of nesting season in January, 2000, the sanctuary biologist and field personnel kept vigil along the sanctuary coast during each night. The first clutch was collected on 23<sup>rd</sup> January. Nesting was observed till February end mostly during the dark phase of the moon. Mortality of 7 gravid females was observed during the period. In all, 14 nests were detected and 1586 eggs were collected. Detection was mainly by following turtle tracks and then probing the soil. The sites from which the clutches had been collected were marked on the beach. Each clutch of eggs was then buried inside the hatchery and their progress monitored.

The first clutch hatched on 16<sup>th</sup> March, 2000 after 54 days. The last clutch had hatched in the 3<sup>d</sup> week of April. In all 1202 eggs hatched, yielding 1010 live hatchlings. The hatchlings weighed on an average 17gms. Care was taken to release the hatchlings at the same spot from where the eggs had been collected. The conservation effort was aimed basically at successful recruitment of hatchlings into the sea by providing adequate protection against predation and no experimental studies were conducted.

### **Request for turtle barnacles**

The most common barnacle on sea turtles is the large and conspicuous *Chelonibia testudinaria* (L.). It commonly occurs on the carapace and plastron. I am preparing a world-wide study of this species and would like to obtain specimens from the Indian subcontinent and adjoining regions. Preferably they should be preserved in 95% ethanol or 70% or even dried. Data for the specimens should include locality, date, species or common name of the host turtle, and name of the collector. All collectors will be acknowledged in the final study. Please ensure that all necessary permits are acquired before shipping. Please forward the specimens to:

**Arnold Ross**

**Marine Biology Research Division, Scripps Institution of Oceanography  
La Jolla, California 92093-0202. USA.**