

## School Education to support sea turtle conservation: Experiences from Goa and Orissa

**Sujeet Kumar M. Dongre**

*Programme Associate, CEE Goa State Office*

*C/o. State Institute of Education, Alto Porvorim, Bardez Goa 403 521. India.*

*Email: ceegoa@ceeindia.org*

Centre for Environment Education (CEE) is a national institution supported by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India. CEE, through its state offices, has initiated a one year educational project to support sea turtle conservation. The project is supported by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India and aims to sensitise teachers and students in three key turtle nesting areas of Goa (Morjim, Galgibag and Agonda), and one site in Orissa (Puri) and through them the local community and tourists, to issues related to turtle conservation.

### **The project involves:**

- ◆ Development of resource material on sea turtles and their conservation for teachers and students
- ◆ Training of teachers in issues relating to turtle conservation, conservation education methods, etc
- ◆ Planning and implementation of a year-long programme of structured educational activities in the selected schools
- ◆ Establishment of linkages between teachers, students, forest officials, the local community, and tourists, for sea turtle conservation.
- ◆ Events organized by the schools for the communities.

CEE in consultation with the Departments of Education selected 24 schools in Goa (Morjim, Galgibag and Agonda) and 16 schools in Orissa (Puri) for this pilot project.

### **Development of resource material on sea turtles for teachers and students**

As part of the project, CEE is developing resource material that includes a manual titled “**Turtles in Trouble**” which is under development. The manual will have both information and activities that the teachers can take up with their classes. The manual will have six chapters viz.: What makes a turtle a turtle, Marine turtles, Habitat, Turtles in our lives,

Threats to sea turtles and sea turtle conservation. The manual will include scientifically validated, current information on Indian sea turtle populations.

A set of 10 colour posters dealing with different species of sea turtles, different phases in the life of turtles, threats to turtles, conservation measures as well as some Dos and Don'ts has been developed.

### **Training of teachers in issues relating to turtle conservation**

Three, three-day workshops were held in Arambol and Poinguinim in Goa in May 2002, and Panaspada in Puri, Orissa in September 2002.

The objective of the workshops was to:

- ◆ Introduce the project and draft manual to the teachers of the selected schools
- ◆ Orient the teachers to turtle conservation issues
- ◆ Make the teachers familiar with active teaching and learning methods, and to carry out the developed activities
- ◆ Develop a programme that would help the teachers to implement the activities during the school year.

A total of 67 teachers of 40 schools have been trained under this project. A draft of the manual was shared with the teachers at the workshops and the reworked draft is being sent to the teachers in instalments, a single section every month, for trial. Simultaneously, comments are being sought on the draft from scientists and field workers. At the end of the year, all the inputs received will be consolidated into the final manuscript which will be printed and disseminated widely.

### **Planning and implementation of a year long set of activities in the selected schools**

The manual that will be developed has to be implemented month-wise in the respective schools.

Each school developed a schedule by which they would implement the activities in the school. It was also discussed that the teachers can carry out education activities in the school to make the community aware of sea turtle conservation. The scientific concepts in the manual could be infused into the curriculum; eg. habitats of turtles can be discussed while teaching about ecosystem and habitat. Extra-curricular activities could also be carried out, including field trips to nearby beaches.

### **Networking**

It is necessary to establish links between teachers, students, forest officials, the local community, and tourists for turtle conservation. One person from each of the above departments were called for the teacher training workshops. The Goa Forest Department carries out regular monitoring of the coast and protection of nests and release of hatchlings. In addition, activities like organising competitions for school students as well as field trips which could help to build a good rapport between the community and the forest department, were discussed. It was also suggested that the panchayat could also play an important role by giving support to the conservation activities and organizing awareness programmes like slide show and talks.

### **Events organised by the schools for the communities**

All project schools were asked to organise a one-day festival in the village or on the beach. The objective of the festival was to spread the word of sea turtle conservation to the community through children. The festival reaches a wider audience, including tourists that visit the beach.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of January a one day festival was organised in Morjim, a nesting beach in Goa. Over two hundred students from 12 schools of Pernem, Goa were present and took part in various events. Posters prepared by students with drawings and messages related to the conservation of turtles were displayed at the festival. A set of 10 posters prepared by CEE were also displayed. Students as well as teachers were enthusiastic about clay-modelling. Each of the schools made one model. Most of the

students made models of the different species of turtles and some actually showed the turtle laying eggs. Poems in English, Marathi, Konkani and Hindi were written by 56 students. Apart from the exhibition, various resource persons gave information on the sea turtle, its biology, importance in the marine ecosystem, various conservation efforts by various agencies and its status. 'The Ridley's last stand', a film by Shekar Dattatri on the status of olive ridley turtles and conservation along the Orissa Coast, was screened. The students enjoyed flying kites in the evening. These were provided by CEE. Each had a picture of a turtle and Save our Sea turtles (SOS) printed on them. The volunteers also participated in this.

The students were taken on a rally through the village with slogans on turtles. The rally reached the main temple in the village, where a skit was performed by them. It was about a hatchling that sees a bigger turtle getting caught in a fisherman's net. The fisherman who accidentally catches the turtle is unaware of its conservation status and sells it to a hotel owner. After his confrontation with the Forest Department he comes to know about its importance and vows never to commit the mistake again. The turtle then finds it safe to return to the coast.

A similar festival was also organised in Galgibaga, on 15<sup>th</sup> of February 2003. Twenty students each of 14 schools of Canacona participated.

The festival was the first occasion of this kind where the conservation message was strongly conveyed to the community. In Morjim, turtle eggs are still under threat because of market demand for them. The enthusiasm of the students surely must have been carried to the community. Through this model project, it is hoped that useful resource material and a model education programme will emerge, which will be useful not only in India, but other countries as well.

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