

controlling flood and tidal wave inundation damage. Detritus (fallen leaves and litter of mangrove trees) is the principal energy source in the mangrove ecosystem and detritivores are food for larger fish. The coastal waters off mangrove forests also benefit through the outwelling of nutrient rich detritus. Mangroves act as shelters for the breeding of crabs, shrimps which though spend their early lives

in mangrove waters. Mangrove ecosystems thus have great economic value through their contribution to the food web in supporting rich estuarine and marine fisheries. It has been estimated that more than one lakh people of the districts of Bhadrak, Kendrapada and Jagatsinghpur depend upon fishing, which can only be sustained if mangroves are present.

An Update on Turtle Conservation Activities in Keralam.

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The Kerala Forest Department launched a project to map the nesting sites and monitor them for a period of 20 months. The project will also interact with the local communities and develop a management plan involving the communities. In addition the project team will assess the illegal trade of turtle meat and turtle mortality. Sri. V.K. Sinha, Chief Wildlife Warden and Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) and I are the Principal Investigators. The project was initiated in March 1999 and will cover two breeding seasons. The project is the first effort to develop a conservation plan for sea turtles in Kerala. Three hatcheries have been established to monitor nesting and to involve the community in maintaining them.

THEERAM Nature Conservation Society, Kolavippalam started the turtle conservation effort by fishermen and local people in 1996. The effort was prompted by a news clipping in 'The Hindu' on the marine turtle conservation and also curiosity to know whether they could hatch turtle eggs normally consumed by locals. The result was good and the whole village supported the efforts. The initiative got very good media coverage. The site became well known and the then DFO of Kozhikode developed a plan to involve this effort under the World Bank supported 'Kerala Forestry Project'. Ms. Pragathi Srivasthava, DFO Kozhikode supported the project by helping

the local people to maintain two hatcheries and employing four assistants to maintain them.

Sand mining was resulting in loss of sand bar and coast; in six months about 20 meters of beach was lost. In January, 1999, the local people started an agitation lead by the Shore protection Council. The high court of Keralam banned sand mining and the order was in place for two months. Then the ban was violated and the Council took up the matter with various levels of the government. The result was an attack on the Theeram activists and local people, resulting in a loss of about a lakh worth of fishing equipment

Marine Turtle Conservation Action is launching a fund raising to compensate the loss and also to support future work. This fund should take care of urgent need of community groups who are involved in turtle conservation like support to maintain the hatchery, reimbursements of expenses in collecting the eggs, urgent veterinary support etc. There are about four other groups who are starting similar work inspired by the Theeram initiative with technical support from Theeram and Marine Turtle Conservation Action.

Nesting has started in 1999-2000, but about 25 dead turtles have been reported so far, including eight Green Turtles, two Hawksbills and fifteen Olive Ridelys.