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Food and feeding of infant olive ridley turtle  
*Lepidochelys olivacea* in captivity

Since hatching on May 17, 1983, 18 olive ridley turtle *Lepidochelys olivacea* (Eschscholtz) are being reared at Bhagbatpur Crocodile Rearing Centre, Sunderbans, West Bengal. Of these some yearlings are still being maintained in a masonry tank. In course of rearing the young ridleys were supplied with a variety of food. They have shown preference for some foods and the food preference noted during the period of first year is described in this note.

After emergence 18 hatchlings were maintained in three plastic wash basins measuring 65×30×35 cm for a fortnight keeping sea water at a depth of 10 cm with a slope of sand on one side. Minced fish (*Boleophthalmus* spp.) and prawns of different varieties were supplied to them regularly. The water in the plastic basin was changed twice daily after feeding. Sea water was used for rearing experiments.

The hatchlings did not eat any of the food supplied on the first day after emergence. On the second day, they were found to nibble at the food. On the third day they were seen feeding and pulling at the food by means of front flippers. From the second week minced prawn and weeds were added. Though occasionally simple biting at the weeds was observed they were found to feed on the minced fish flesh and prawn. At the close of second week the hatchlings were offered live fish fry and prawn fry but they did not feed on them.

Two week old hatchlings were then transferred to a tank 300×300×75 cm having a slope of sand on one corner for basking or resting. Water was filled to a depth of 25 cm. Throughout the experiment sea water was used and the water of the tank was changed at least once daily. Special care was given to maintain the strict hygienic conditions. The hatchlings were offered a variety of food viz. chopped fish (*Boleophthalmus* spp.,

*Mugil* sp.), flesh of molluscs (*Telescopium* sp., *Modulus* sp.), minced prawn (*Penaeus* sp., *Acetes* sp.) and crabs (*Sesarma* sp., *Uca* sp.) collecting mostly from estuarine waters. All the food items were also supplied separately in the form of pieces. Live specimens were supplied in the rearing tank. The hatchlings fed greedily on the chopped fish, when the chopped fish or minced prawn feed were dropped into the water of the tank, the turtles dive to the bottom and pick up morsels in their mouth, raise the head slightly out of water and gulping down the food. At the age of 10 months and onwards the young turtles have been observed to capture the live *Boleophthalmus* fish, prawns and crabs though the amount of chopped and minced food consumed was still higher.

Different aspects of food and feeding in olive ridleys have been studied by Whittaker<sup>1</sup>, Biswas<sup>2</sup> and Banerjee<sup>3</sup> but further information on feeding hatchlings from the Sunderbans estuary would be helpful in establishing a successful turtle fishery in India.

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