

The undersea life in the Andamans and Nicobars is as rich and varied as any in a tropical coral reef area. The collection of molluscs such as cowries, helmet shells, trochus, turbo, chank and murex shells is becoming increasingly big business. Shell ornaments are popular, especially among people of Bengali origin.

Near the jetty at Katchal island where I utilized the stopover period of a inter-island ferryboat to take a quick plunge in the sea, I excitedly beheld the first colony of garden eels (troglodyte eels) that I had seen, on a sloping sandy bed in about 15 ft of water. As I approached them, they simultaneously retreated tail-first into their sandy burrows, swaying like stalks of vegetation in the gentle swell. Dr. Hans Hass has recorded the presence of troglodyte eels from deeper water off Great Nicobar island, but whether or not these were of the same species as the ones I saw, I am unable to confirm.

Close to the town of Wandoor in South Andaman, the intertidal fauna is particularly rich. Large chitons cling to spray-moistened rocks; sea cucumbers of at least five species are found in the shallows. A small pale white octopus crawled over rocks exposed by the tide.

South of the hamlet of Fulo Babi on Great Nicobar island, I twice observed avian predators -- perhaps Nicobar Serpent Eagles -- snatch up octopi from a reef exposed at low tide. In one instance the bird was forced to drop its prey after partaking of a bite or two, because of the mollusc's weight. Despite having a chunk missing from its mantle, I found the octopus to be alive and active after its fall.

I was fortunate enough to see civet cats (Paradoxurus tytleri) on two occasions: Once at day break on uninhabited Tarmugli island at a distance of ten feet as it leisurely climbed to the top of a tall tree, and another individual at dusk as it searched for titbits among crevices in the exposed reef on Rutland Island, much as I had observed wild pig do in Little Andaman. On both occasions the civets displayed a degree of apparent unconcern about the proximity of a human being that was startling to me.

It is to be hoped that the rapidly expanding population in the Andamans and Nicobars and the influx of refugees and settlers, with the resultant need for living space and resources like timber, will not result in the undermining of its irreplaceable forest wealth or cause the disappearance of the surviving negrito tribes and of their culture.
Satish Bhaskar.

TURTLE MEAT KILLS THREE

Tuticorin, June 17, 1980 (UNI)

Turtle meat took three lives -- one directly and two indirectly --today. Two suckling infants aged six months and one year died after their mothers had taken turtle meat, and a seven-year old girl who took the meat also died today, official sources said.

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headquarters hospital here. 57 were treated as out-patients and 22 were still in hospital.

From the 'Indian Express' Wednesday, June 18, 1980.

It appears likely that the turtle in question was a Hawksbill sea turtle (Eretmochelys imbricata), a species which has been indicated recurrently as causing deaths in India and Sri Lanka. The following instances have been recorded:

On 6th and 7th August 1977, nine persons -- two adults and seven children of varying ages -- died in the village of Manappada, southern Tamil Nadu from eating, on 3rd August, the meat of a sea turtle whose head was described as being somewhat aquiline and as resembling a parrot's beak. The sea turtle was also known locally as "Natchely Ammai" which means "turtle with a mouse-like head" and had a yellow plastron whereas that of the sea turtle species that was usually consumed 'in all likelihood, the green turtle, (Chelonia mydas) was always white. On this occasion, some of the fishermen's advice against consumption of the meat, on the basis of it being an occasionally poisonous variety, went unheeded. In 1970, deaths occurred at the village of Periathalai, 7 miles from Manappada, from the consumption of turtle meat.

In 1972, about 20 persons died in Thazai village from Hawksbill meat poisoning. (Valliappan and Pushparaj, 1973).

Deraniyagala (1953) cites instances of deaths in Sri Lanka in June 1921 at Mandaitivu (24 persons) and on December 3, 1941 at Habaraduva "Its toxicity is thought to be due to the diet of the animal at the time; accordingly fishermen chop its liver and throw it to the crows before cooking its flesh. If the crows refuse it, the animal is discarded. Another test is to mix the raw flesh with slaked lime which turns greenish if the flesh is poisonous".

Valliappan and Pushparaj cite additional tests that some Tuticorin fishermen employ: the turtle's blood drips off quickly if the meat is nonpoisonous and thickens on the knife blade if poisonous. A drop of blood on the skin itches and the spot becomes inflamed if the meat is poisonous.

Among symptoms of Hawksbill meat poisoning are:

Neurological symptoms like vertigo, twitching of the muscles leading to convulsions, coma and finally death. Ulceration throughout the buccal cavity, severe itching sensation in and sloughing of the upper layers of the tongue. A sensation of obstruction in the chest, respiratory failure followed by cardiac failure.

In the absence of knowledge of the exact type of poison involved, patients were given high doses of tetracycline, massive doses of vitamin C and corticosteroids and were put on plenty of fluids and diuretics. Where treatment was started before the collapsing stage, cases responded very satisfactorily to the administration of 'Siquil' as an antiemetic, "Anthisan" tablets for food allergy and

"Terramycin" injection for the infection. In all cases where death occurred, one to four days elapsed from the time the meat was consumed.

The above data were kindly supplied by Berchmann Moraes and Dr. B.V. Balaji of Manappad, and by Drs. S.C. Thanupillai, G.C.I.M. and Dr. Ramasubramaniam of Udangudi.

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MUGGER (Crocodylus palustris) RELEASES IN ANDHRA PRADESH & TAMIL NADU

Andhra Pradesh

On 7th April 1980, the Andhra Pradesh Crocodile Conservation project released 33 mugger crocodiles (11 males and 22 females hatched in June 1977) into the Kinnerasani reservoir situated within the Kinnerasani Wildlife Sanctuary. This sanctuary is located 300 km north-east of Hyderabad. The released crocodiles all ranged from 1 to 1.3 m in size. Follow up monitoring survey of the released crocodiles was carried out in August 1980. Some have shown a upstream movement of over 15 km during this monsoon time.

During previous surveys in this reservoir only a few (less than five) resident muggers were reported. No breeding has taken place in past years. Since, the released muggers are all of Gir (Gujarat) origin and are a very slow growing strain (1.2 m in three years!) it was decided not to mix them up with the resident Andhra Pradesh wild breeding stock occurring in the Krishna and Godavari rivers and some other tributary rivers. The remaining 58 Gir muggers of 1977 origin are being released in Pakhal Wildlife sanctuary and again in Kinnerasani sanctuary. These releases are planned for the coming winter (November 1980 to February 1981).

Tamil Nadu

The second large scale mugger release by the Tamil Nadu Crocodile Conservation Project was carried out at Hoggenakal in May 1980. (The first release was in March 1979 when 130 muggers of 1976 and 1977 stock were released into Krishnagiri lake).

On 30th May 1980 a total of 47 mugger all results of wild eggs collected from Cauvery river near Hoggenakal during 1976, 1977 and 1978, were released into the Cauvery river 15 to 20 km upstream of the Hoggenakal Falls. The 47 released crocodiles measured between 1.2 to 1.9 m in size. In this little disturbed area it is hoped that these crocodiles will find a most suitable habitat to live in and multiply.

B.C. Choudhury.

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