

Information on the status and distribution of the olive ridley in the Sunderbans was not available, when the first batch of 600 eggs of the ridley arrived at Bhagabatur for artificial incubation in March, 1985. Their presence in this estuarine area being indicated

INTRODUCTION

Reports on the presence of the ridley in the number of nesting beaches along the Sunderban coast. The present investigation has indicated a number of ridley nesting grounds. Comparisons of the physiographic data with other nesting beaches indicate the width of the ecological niche. A 39% rearing success in the first year and a 100% rearing success in the second year suggest guidelines for captive rearing programmes. Growth statistics are provided to gauge the success of captive rearing technique, as a faster growth reduces cost of rearing. Experiments conducted on the feeding behaviour of sub-adults showed a marked preference for crabs such as *Uca* and *Sesarma* over fish and prawns. The successful treatment of a fatal skin ailment with dilute $KMnO_4$ solution, but its persistent recurrence creates scope for discussion and further investigation.

ABSTRACT

THE MARINE TURTLE *LEPIDOCHELYS OLIVACEA* ESCHSCHOLTZ, ITS OCCURRENCE AND CAPTIVE REARING IN SUNDERBANS

Synonym on endangered marine animals
 and marine parks, Cochin, 1985
 Paper no 26
 R. Banerjee
 Banank Pandan
 (63)

15/11/85

by ridley catches in fishermen's nets, brought to Rajdighi and Kakkwip during December to March every year. Statistical analysis on the number of riddleys caught is difficult to compile as the trade is done underground. Turtle shells can however be found lying by the roadside at market places near any one of these centres during the period under study. 90 riddleys were found held captive in a pond in Kakkwip in January 1984 (Nandi pers. comm.). Other reports on this clandestine trade suggests an overall operation, large enough to indicate a population of enough magnitude along the estuarine beach, to call for management measures and ensure a viable number in perpetuity. The present paper summarizes the information gathered in the course of a preliminary reconnaissance of the area and results obtained in captive rearing of the turtle.

Riddleys are caught while floating at the surface during the breeding season. As this overlaps the nesting season February - March in the Sunderbans, some are also caught in fishermen's net while coming to the shore to lay. The principle decimating factor is however the poaching of eggs by man and nest predation by boar (*Sus scrofa*), monitor lizards (*Varanus* spp.) and cats, as was indicated during this study.

The author acknowledges with thanks the help received from Dr. A.K. Lahiri, Conservator of Forests, Central Circle, West Bengal, Shri U. Dasgupta and Shri A. Roy, Divisional Forest Officer, 24 Parganas Division, for providing valuable advice and guidance in the preparation of the present report.

Nesting ground of riddleys in Sunderbans

Mass nesting of riddleys in West Bengal have been reported earlier (Biswas, 1982). In Sunderbans, the Lothian seaface and Sagar Islands have been mentioned as areas where riddley eggs and hatchlings have been found (Biswas, 1982). During the present study, nesting grounds have been located in course of ridley egg searching for turtle rearing projects in Sunderbans under the