

Five species of sea turtles, the leatherback *Dermochelys coriacea*, hawksbill *Eretmochelys imbricata*, olive ridley *Lepidochelys olivacea*, loggerhead *Caretta caretta* and green turtle *Chelonia mydas* occur in the Indian seas. All of them are found along the southeast coast, especially in the Gulf of Mannar (Kar and Bhaskar 1995). Turtle fishing was practised in this region for ages, and chelonians were exported to Sri Lanka and other countries until a couple of decades ago (Agastheesapillai and Thiragarajan 1979, Frazier 1980). In the present paper, we report the exploitation and some aspects of the ethnology of sea turtles along the south-east coast of Tamil Nadu, India. We surveyed most of the coastal villages covering the entire southeast coast (c. 250 km; Fig. 1), from Cape Comorin (now Kanya Kumari; 8° 4' 40" N, 77° 33' 4" E) to Dhanushkodi (9° 9' 9" N, 79° 26' 46" E) during November 2001. We interviewed the fishermen for information on the occurrence of turtles, their common names and exploitation by locals. Village markets and garbage dumps were also checked for live turtles or shells to quantify the exploitation. Altogether, we surveyed 29 localities, and obtained 48 cases of sea turtle exploitation in 13 localities. This includes all species except the loggerhead. About 94% of the turtles exploited

(With one text-figure)

8. EXPLOITATION OF SEA TURTLES ALONG THE SOUTHEAST COAST OF TAMIL NADU, INDIA

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Karthik  
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