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Sea Turtles of Andhra coast

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A PRELIMINARY SURVEY OF SEA TURTLES OF THE ANDHRA COAST

VISAKHAPATNAM SEA COAST

Investigation about the sea turtle was carried out at the Lawson Bay, Waltair, one of the most important fish landing centre in Andhra Pradesh.

Though *Lepidochelys olivacea* Eschscholtz, commonly known as Olive Ridley, is the predominant species of the Waltair coast. There are instances of other three species of sea turtle being caught in the sea of Visakhapatnam or coming for nesting occasionally on the shore. These species are *Chelonia mydas agassizii* Bolourt, *Eretmochelys imbricata* (Linn.) and *Dermochelys coriacea* (Linn.)

The coastal sea bed between Lawson Bay and Bimilipatnam is a very good pasture ground of Green Turtle, its bed being rocky sea algae or the turtle grass grow well. This sea algae is favorite food of green turtle. Occasionally Green turtle is caught in the nets of fishermen at Waltair coast though they seldom nest on the beach. This species is mainly insular in distribution. Such a male Green turtle was caught in December 1978. This specimen is being maintained at the Waltair Zoogarden in a cemented tank on the fresh algae food more than a year. One juvenile Hawkbill, *Eretmochelys imbricata* (carapace, 20.5 cm x 15 cm., Plastron, 15.8 x 13.5 cm.) was collected from fishermen at the Lawson Bay. The specimen was caught in the net of a fishermen in the middle of November and it was kept alive more than two months in a small enclosure of stones on

the beach fed with small fishes. It was informed that one Hawkbill laid on this beach a clutch of hundred eggs on 1978.

The main turtle fishing season only of Olive Ridley in this area is November and December. In the peak period minimum 100 turtles are caught per day depending on number of boats operating during this period. Turtle fishing ends usually in 3rd week of January. Due to Government ban turtles are not at present booked by train to the Calcutta but by truck. Reliable information is that businessmen from Dumduma, a place in Koraput district of Orissa come to the Bay to purchase turtle.

It is known from a report of CMFRI (1979) that 23,282 kgs., was the estimated annual catch in that year from this area. No estimate of previous years are available.

INFORMATION FROM OTHER AREAS OF THE ANDHRA COAST

Information from Masulipatnam area shows that though turtles lay egg on sea shore between Maddopatanam & Samaldevi neither turtle fishing nor marketing is being carried out in this area. The reason is most of the fishermen of this area belong to "Agni Kula Kasthrya" a sect of Hindu religion who revered turtle as the representative of god.

Turtle also nest on beach from the Sriakulam area of Andhra Pradesh upto Gopalpur on sea of Orissa coast.

Some informations of turtle fishing in the Andhra coast bordering Ganjam district of Orissa during period of 1970 to 1973 were available. Some such places in the Srikakulam coast of Andhra are Kalingapatanam, Srikakulam, Balarampuram, and Kunduvanipata.

PROPOSAL FOR CONSERVATION OF SEATURTLE IN THE ANDHRA COAST

Winter season is the peak period of fishing in the Vizag coast when copulated turtles float on the surface of the sea. Therefore they become easy victim to the nylon drag nets (Biswas 1982). Fishing operation by trawlers should be carried out off the coast.

There is a good site in the Waltair zoogarden adjacent to the Lawson Bay for

starting a pilot project of Turtle Ranch or breeding centre as is in operation at Field Station of Surinam Forest Service to raise hatched sea turtle in captivity. (Marine turtle News letter No. 7, April, 1975.).

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