

Item 10 (1 & 2) : Jan 2 May 1985 RPN  
MARINE TURTLE DRAIN 2628 DAS

Although marine turtles are protected under Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (protection) Act of 1972, they continue to be items of trade in the turtle markets of West Bengal. The commonest species in the markets is the olive ridley (Lepidochelys olivacea), though hawksbills (Eretmochelys imbricata) turn up occasionally.

Most of the turtles are caught off the coast of Orissa and transported by trucks to Howrah with their flippers and feet wired or stitched together. At Howrah the turtles are sold to retailers for Rs.60/- (U.S. \$5.00) each. The retailers in turn sell them to the consumers at Rs.6 to 8 per Kg. Unlike freshwater turtles, marine turtles are not sold in the Calcutta markets. Instead they are sent to the suburbs, nearby towns and villages, including Canning in the Sunderbans, where they are sold in the markets openly. Most of the customers for marine turtle flesh belong to the lower income group for whom the meat is a source of cheap protein.

Some statistics: Before 1981, 6 to 7 truck loads of sea turtles used to arrive in Howrah every day, each load containing between 125 and 150 turtles. The influx generally started in November and continued till March with a peak from late December to early March. At a conservative estimate at least 80,000 sea turtles (almost all olive ridleys) came into Howrah alone each season. The male/female sex ratio in a sample of 200 olive ridleys in Howrah was 7:3.

In the 1983-84 peak season (perhaps due to increased vigilance on the part of the Orissa and W. Bengal Forest Depts.) only one truck load of sea turtles came into Howrah everyday. However, the tide is far from having been stemmed. If the 1984-85 figures are anything to go by, poachers continue to operate with impunity (& immunity?).

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The freshwater turtle trade in  
MADHYA PRADESH

Howrah in West Bengal has traditionally been the main fresh water turtle market in India. The merchandise is caught in the rivers of many northern states and transported to Howrah by train. That Bhopal city in Madhya Pradesh is one of the major exporters of this favoured commodity became evident from a market survey between 1979 and 1982. A large number of softshells, mostly Trionyx gangeticus and Lissemys punctata and the hardshell Testudo testudo are caught from the Betwa and Parbati rivers and local lakes by means of baited hooks. While the bulk of the catch is sold to middlemen to be exported to Howrah, a small portion is marketed locally for consumption, mainly by the Bengali community. A whole turtle may sell for Rs.5 per kg. of body weight, fetching upto Rs.150/- for a large softshell. Retail prices range from