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RPN 753 [KRI]

# Instance of Meat of Leatherback Turtle *Dermochelys coriacea* (Linneus) Used as Food

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This note contains an account of how a female Leatherback turtle, *Dermochelys coriacea*, accidentally caught and landed at Vizhinjam on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2002, and how its meat was marketed in Kattakkada fish market, for human consumption. Marine turtle meat and eggs have great commercial value because they are a good source of protein. From time immemorial its meat is consumed as food by the coastal community.

*Dermochelys coriacea*, is one of the rarest and largest among the sea turtles in the world. There are several instances of capturing leatherback turtles when they come to the shore for laying eggs. The eggs are collected for food and sold in markets in different places. Similarly leatherback turtles which are accidentally washed ashore are usually thrown back in to the sea or buried in the beach itself. However, no published information is available about the consumption of the meat of Leatherback turtles as food any-

where in the world.

On receiving information on 30 September 2002 at about 10 a.m. regarding the capture of a large leatherback turtle, the author visited the site to make an on the spot study to confirm the identification of the turtle and collect information. By enquiry it was known that the leatherback turtle weighing about 200 kg was caught in a gill net and landed at about 9.00 a.m. on the same day. It was auctioned there itself for Rs. 500/-.

The turtle was butchered and packed in 3 bamboo baskets with sufficient ice for marketing at Kattakkada market, 20km



Fig 1 : A sales woman is cutting the head of Leatherback turtle at Kattakada fish market

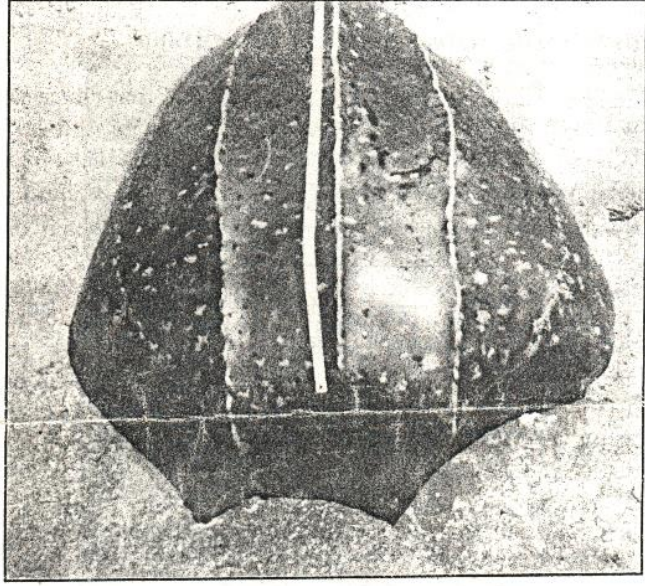


Fig 2 : Dorsal side of carapace (141 cm) of the leatherback turtle caught at Vizhinjam on 3/10/2002

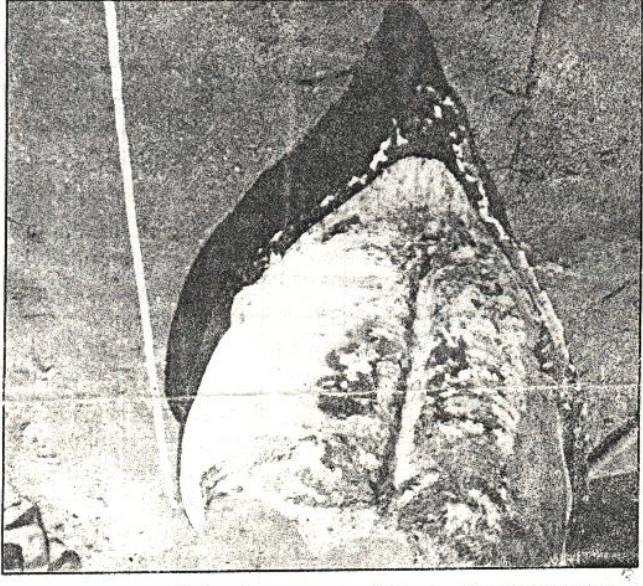


Fig 3 : Ventral side of carapace of the leatherback turtle caught at Vizhinjam on 3/10/2002