

MARINE TURTLE RESOURCES

R.S. LAL MOHAN¹

INTRODUCTION

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands with their numerous uninhabited islands and undisturbed sea shores offer ideal conditions for the nesting of sea turtles. However, many areas which were formerly frequented by the turtles for nesting have been abandoned due to increased human activities. Habitat destruction, removal of eggs and killing of the nesting females by the people have already caused some damage to the sea turtle resource of Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Davis and Altevogt (1976), Whitaker (1977) and Bhaskar (1979) studied the marine turtles of Andaman islands. Bhaskar (1979) reported on the nests of eggs and hatchlings of *Chelonia mydas*, *Lepidochelys olivacea* and *Dermochelys coriacea*.

NESTING SITES OF TURTLES

During the survey of the Andaman and Nicobar islands efforts were made to locate the turtle nests along the coast of the islands. The nests were located with the help of the 'Karen' fishermen who are known for their ability to spot the turtle nests. The sea shore was probed with a pointed bamboo reaper.

In North Andaman, turtle nests were reported from almost all the islands, particularly from Landfall Island, Table Island, Turtle Island and Sound Island. In the Middle Andaman, turtle nests were found in Long Island and Strait Island. The Betapur shore near Rangat was another favoured nesting site for the turtles. The sea shores of Ross Island, Burmanalla, Chiriyatapu, Wandoor and Cinque Island are some of the areas where a large number of marine turtles frequent for nesting. In Little Andaman, the turtle nests were found in Hut Bay, Butler Bay and South Bay. Many areas in Nicobar Islands are also known for their turtle nesting sites. Bompoka Island, Katchall Island and Anderson Bay are some of the favoured nesting sites.

¹Present address :

¹CMFRI, Regional Centre, Mandapam Camp.

FARMING OF SEA TURTLES

Turtle farming is practised in many Central American countries (Jones and Fernando, 1973). The high price obtained for turtle products like shells, calipee and turtle meat makes turtle farming viable. Davis and Altevogt (1976) and Whitaker (1977) suggested large turtle farms in Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The availability of turtle eggs and many suitable farming sites along the coast make the Andaman and Nicobar islands a preferred place for turtle farming for conservation of the resources.

Besides habitat destruction and large-scale collection of turtle eggs by the local tribes and settlers, many nests are destroyed along with the eggs by the wild dogs (Fig. 1) and monitors (*Varanus salvator*). Near

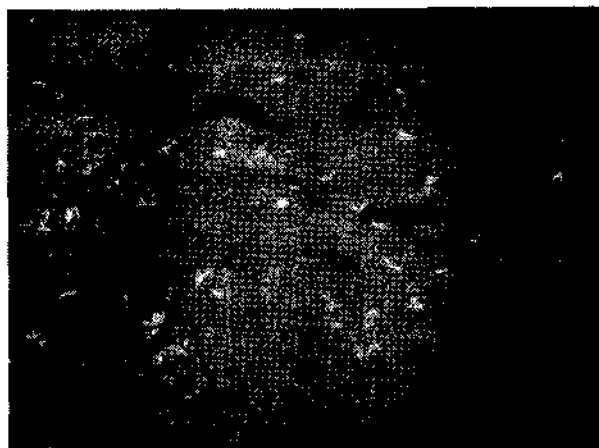


Fig. 1. Turtle egg shell remnants from a nest destroyed by dogs in Betapur beach near Rangat.

Rangat it was observed that about 20 nests had been damaged and the eggs eaten by wild dogs in an area of about 50 m². The local tribes Onges, Shompens and Jarawas subsist on the turtle eggs as they form part of

their staple food (Man, 1883 ; Kloss, 1902). Nevertheless large number of eggs can be saved if timely action is taken to remove the eggs to safe places and hatch

them. The hatchlings can be released to the sea as done by the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute on the mainland (Anon., 1978).

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