

to be surveyed during the breeding season. The main threat to marine turtles in Goa is egg poaching by humans and incidental catch in trawler nets.

Status in Maharashtra

A total of 25 localities from three coastal districts of Maharashtra were visited. In Maharashtra, the marine turtles nest on the entire coast. All the sites visited have recent nesting records. As per the information gathered from the locals, the population of turtles has drastically declined in

the last 10 years. At most of the sites the locals informed us that earlier 15 to 20 turtles used to visit each beach for nesting every year but now the number is reduced to less than five. A site at Harehwar in Raigad district has good potential. Besides this, beaches at Shiroda-Aravali and Motemal have good nesting records and these are to be surveyed during the forthcoming breeding season. The population of the marine turtles in Maharashtra is under serious threat due to indiscriminate poaching of eggs by humans and incidental catch in fishing nets.

News from Orissa

There was both good and bad news during the 1999 – 2000 season in Orissa. The supercyclone in October, 1999 crippled much of the state's machinery and many conservation organizations including Operation Kachhapa were involved in providing cyclone relief. Consequently, conservation of sea turtles was not exactly a priority. It is believed that more than 20, 000 olive ridleys died during this season as a consequence of trawling related mortality. (*The Orissa high court in its May 14, 1998, judgement in a case of WWF India Vs. State of Orissa had ordered that all fishing trawlers be equipped with*

turtle excluder devices (TEDs) to avoid turtles being caught in their nets). However, in late March, mass nesting did take place at the Nasi islands off the Gahirmatha coast. This again is no cause to celebrate as the islands have become even more fragmented and narrow after the supercyclone and much of the nesting area is constantly inundated, resulting in very low hatching success. Conservation initiatives and enforcement of nearshore mechanized fishing bans have to be implemented with greater vigour in the coming season if mortality is to be reduced.

More news from Dhamra

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On 22nd September, a division bench of Honourable Orissa High Court consisting of Honourable Mr. Justice P.C. Naik and Justice Mr. P.K. Mohanty after hearing the submissions of Sri Raj Panjwani, Advocate issued notices to:

- Ministry of Surface Transport, Government of India,

- Ministry of Environment, Government of India
- International Sea Ports Pvt. Ltd., Chennai
- Forest and Environment Dep't., Government of Orissa
- Chief Wildlife Warden, Orissa

on a joint petition filed by Biswajit Mohanty and the Wildlife Protection Society of India seeking review of the environment clearance given to the proposed Dhamra Port Project. The said project had been cleared by the Ministry of Surface Transport under the Coastal Regulation Zone Notification without going for formal clearance to the Ministry of Environment of the Government of India. In an earlier petition the court's attention had been drawn to the lack of implementation of orders passed by the Orissa High Court on 14th May, 1998 regarding directions to the state government to regulate fishing activity by mechanised fishing trawlers for protection of sea turtles off the coast of Orissa.

The petition expressed apprehensions on the impact by the proposed Dhamra Port Project on the habitat and breeding of olive ridley Sea turtles and how migratory and reproductive patches of turtles could be affected. The petitioner further drew attention to the fact that there was reduction of the area of Bhitarkanika National Park from 367 to 145 sq. kms in the final notification by which important ecological sensitive areas were excluded. The EIA report prepared by Kirloskar Consultants, Pune and Aquaculture Foundation of

India, on the port project did not sufficiently take into account the effect on the migration routes and reproductive activities of olive ridley sea turtles. The petition discussed the effect of artificial lighting and also on the movement of large cargo ships ranging from 60,000 DWT to 1,20,000 DWT on turtle activity. The largest nesting ground of sea turtles in the world is located at Nasi Islands close to the Dhamra Port. It may be recalled that the National Environment Appellant Authority had also upheld the environmental clearance given earlier by the MOST, and the order of this Authority has also been challenged.

The most interest aspect is that the Bhitarkanika National Park consisting of 367 sq. km was constituted on 3.10.1988. The state government entered into a contract with International Sea Ports in October, 1997 for construction of Dhamra Port and in September, 1998 the State government issued the final notification constituting the Bhitarkanika National Park whereby the National Park area was reduced to 145 sq. kms allegedly to enable the construction of the port which fell right in the centre of the proposed National Park .

Conservation genetics of olive ridleys on the east coast of India

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Introduction

The study of sea turtles has largely been confined to the brief period in their life cycle when they come ashore to nest. In recent times, molecular genetic tools have played a major role in answering questions of biological and ecological interest in marine turtles. While field based tagging studies of several thousand turtles over thirty years merely provided clues of natal

homing behaviour in turtles (i.e. the return of nesting adult females to the beach where they hatched), studies using genetic markers were able to prove the theory conclusively in green turtles and other species (Bowen, 1996). Molecular genetic markers have been widely used in studying global population structure of sea turtles, in tracing the source of turtles caught in deep sea and other fisheries, and in tracing the long distance migratory routes of these species.