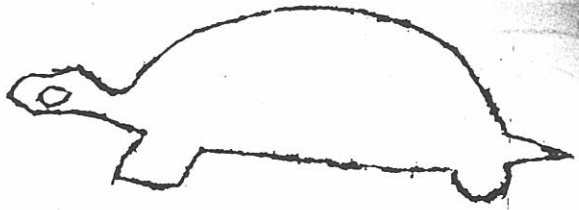


Ham 8(2)

May 1983



TURTLE SURVEY UPDATE (January to April 1983)

In the last issue of Hamadryad (January '83) J. Vijaya reported on the initial survey trips taken October through December to Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. Since this report our survey team (Moll, Vijaya and Satish Bhaskar) have visited Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and Bihar. Brief accounts of these trips follow.

Madhya Pradesh- Uttar Pradesh (Chambal River) survey: On our first trip to the Chambal River (January 15-31), we arrived at the end of the Kachuga tentoria nesting season and the beaches were strewn with egg shells from predated nests as well as shells of the turtles themselves which are apparently also subject to considerable predation. K.tentoria were seen basking in large numbers along with a few Lissemys punctata and Kachuga dhongoka but large turtles of other species were conspicuously absent (possibly because of the cool weather).

In addition to the turtles, we were treated to a vast array of Chambal wildlife which abounds within the confines of the Gharial Sanctuary. Besides the gharial themselves, we saw flocks of flamingos, black and white ibis, sarus cranes, bar-headed geese, spotted ducks and brahminy natkas. Particularly exciting was the occasional appearance of river dolphins and otters

After spending a week with the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department (our host) we moved across the state line to visit with the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department at Etawah. Here they had just confiscated an illegal shipment of turtles destined for the Calcutta market. The shipment included 29 Trionyx gangeticus, 3 Chitra indica and 180 Lissemys punctata. Some of this group were in too bad a condition to save but we hired a truck and hauled them to Pinahat where we released them into the Chambal (their presumed origin). Hopefully the majority survived.

Before leaving Etawah, we were privileged to watch a demonstration of a turtle catching technique by Kanjar tribals. Using long bamboo poles with iron spikes at one end, they waded into the Yamuna river probing the bottom. In two hours, they came up with a large number of Kachuga tentoria, one juvenile Kachuga dhongoka, a Lissemys and one juvenile Trionyx gangeticus.

Our most interesting find of this survey period was a Kachuga kachuga male. This has to be one of the gaudiest turtles extant. The turtle's head is blue-black with a bright red patch on top which joins with bright red stripes running the length of the neck. Needless to say we exposed considerable film in this animal's honour.