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CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE OLIVE RIDLEY ON THE MADRAS COAST IN SOUTH INDIA

Kartik Shanker

Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore 560012, India. kartik@ces.iisc.ernet.in

The Olive Ridelys that nest on the Madras coast appear to be on the decline, as do other populations on Indian coasts. While Whitaker estimated 100 nests/km/season in 1973, estimates ranged from 5-20 nests/km/season from 1988-1996. Nesting declined to 2-3 nests/km in 1997 and 1998. The main causes for the decline are the direct and indirect effects of urbanization. While poaching may have been prevalent prior to urbanization, it seems to have increased dramatically since. Public beaches and residential areas (which have expanded south along the coast about 1 km per year) are brightly lit. Habitat degradation has occurred due to sand mining and encroachment. Further, due to the decline in traditional fishing as a livelihood, because of pollution and competition from motorized trawlers, turtles have lost a protector (traditional fisherfolk worship turtles) and gained an enemy (opportunistic poaching by younger fishermen).

Various groups have been involved in sea turtle conservation on the Madras coast since 1973. The Students Sea Turtle Conservation Network (SSTCN) designed a cost-effective hatchery in 1988 (study area and methods are described in Shanker, 1994). Between 1988 and 1997, we collected 700 nests and released about 55,000 hatchlings. The mortality of hatchlings (largely dead in pipped eggs) was high (20 to 30%) during 1988-91. Survival of hatchlings was inversely correlated with clutch size from 1989-1991 and with environmental temperatures in 1989-90. Low Survival in

the hatchery was overcome by lowering nest density from 2 to 1 nest/m² in 1991-92, so that hatchling survival increased from 48% in 1990-91 to 84% in 1991-92.

Urbanization and fishing communities both continue to pose threats to nesting turtles, and coastal residents need to be mobilized to provide protection for the turtles. Earlier traditions can be revived in the fishing communities; this can be reinforced in various ways by the adjoining urban community which has the requisite financial resources. In this manner, those immediately in contact with the turtles can ensure their sustained protection on this and other inhabited coasts.

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AGREEMENT FOR THE CONSERVATION OF SEA TURTLES ON THE CARIBBEAN COAST OF PANAMA, COSTA RICA AND NICARAGUA

Lucinda K. Taft¹, Chris Wold², Thomas T. Ankersen³, Lizbeth Espinoza⁴, Mario Boza^{1and5}, Anne Meylan⁶, and Peter Meylan⁷

¹Caribbean Conservation Corporation

²Center for International Environmental Law, Northwestern School of Law of Lewis Clark Law College

³Center for Governmental Responsibility, University of Florida College of Law

⁴Centro de Derecho Ambiental y Recursos Naturales, San Jose, Costa Rica

⁵Wildlife Conservation Society

⁶State of Florida Department of Environmental Protection, St. Petersburg, FL, U.S.A.

⁷Eckerd College, St. Petersburg, FL, U.S.A. ccc@cccturtle.org

A draft "Agreement for the Conservation of Sea Turtles on the Caribbean Coast of Panama, Costa Rica and Nicara-

gua" has been prepared to provide a framework for a coordinated and systematic multinational approach to the conser-