

NEWS AND REPORTS

Report on the GOI - UNDP Sea turtle Workshop, Andaman & Nicobar Island, India

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A capacity building and training workshop was conducted on 26th and 27th June 2003 at Vansadan, Andaman & Nicobar Islands Forest Department, Port Blair, Andaman Islands. The workshop was organized by the Andaman Nicobar Environmental Team and Madras Crocodile Bank Trust, Tamilnadu, in collaboration with the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun.

The objectives of the workshop were to facilitate exchange of information, expertise and techniques, to provide training on basic biology of sea turtles, evaluation of threats, beach management and hatchery programmes for the conservation of sea turtles, to evaluate the status and threats to sea turtles, the best approaches to reduce threats and implementation of threat reduction measures. Further, the workshop aimed to introduce community based conservation with a view to integrating local communities in sea turtle conservation programmes and to emphasise public awareness programmes

Resource persons made presentations on an overview of sea turtles of the world and India, threats to sea turtles, biology of sea turtles, research techniques, sea turtle conservation, some aspects of data collection, hatchery management and beach management programmes. Subsequently, group discussions were used to identify problems and approaches to solving the problems. While a variety of different issues were raised, it was stressed that interaction between different agencies and interagency communication needed to be strengthened. Based on the above discussions, groups were formulated to discuss approaches to dealing with enforcement, threats and awareness.

Enforcement

Current enforcement at sea is by the Coast Guard and Indian Navy. There is lack of communication between Coast Guard and Navy with Forest Department and Police. No direct communication

channels are currently available. It was also pointed out that currently, the Coast Guard is empowered only for apprehending foreign vessels and not the local ships/boats, and is therefore constrained in the enforcement of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act. On the other hand, lack of skill, equipment, manpower and training makes it difficult for the Forest Department to enforce laws. With regard to laws, a number of issues were raised., including whether there were enough laws. It was suggested that surveillance radars could be used to locate all offshore ships, and information about wildlife laws related to marine environment needed to be made available to all agencies, including maps with boundaries of protected areas and national parks. Other suggestions included communication by a common channel between agencies, community awareness of laws, maps of sand mining areas and licenses, and the necessity for fishing boats to have proper permits.

Specific requests of the Coast Guard include:

???Relevant extract of Wild Life Act, Tribal Act, Fisheries Act

???Rules to effect maritime enforcement, notification for empowering the Coast Guard

???List of forest check posts to handover offenders

???Telephone numbers of forest outposts

???Directory of National Parks and their coordinates

???Lists and maps of designated sand mining areas

???Common channel for communication

Threats to sea turtles

Sand mining

The implementation and regulation of sand mining operations was discussed. It was agreed that sand mining had to be phased out over a period of time. It was recommended that sand could be provided on subsidy from mainland, and publicity and awareness could be generated on the use of pulverized sand for construction.

Pollution

Discussions also centred around pollution and waste disposal. Maximum plastic and debris are found in Coco channel, 10 degree channel and 6 degree channel, which is where most of the turtles and dugongs get hit by propellers as well. Deposits and waste from international vessels along the coast was also said to be high. A seasonal debris cleaning programme in collaboration with local non government organizations was suggested. It was also recommended that remote islands are cleaned before the nesting season so that sea turtles are not prevented from nesting. Ships' garbage disposal, recycling and solid waste management were discussed. Regulations and recommendations for bilge oil disposal need to be formulated. Used oil reception facility and bilge oil separators were recommended. A total ban on plastic bags was recommended. Biodegradable and non biodegradable waste handling and management and plastic solid waste management needs to be strengthened. Plasma incinerators and point of source restrictions were suggested.

Fisheries

With regard to fisheries, there are very few trawlers in the Andamans and they do not cause much damage. Even so, the purchase of equipments and subsidy on TEDs was deemed useful. A strict control on mesh size for trawlers and other fishermen was suggested. Some areas need notification as no fishing zones along sea turtle feeding and nesting habitats. The Fishery Regulation Act needs to be revised, with inputs from the Forest Department to incorporate new protected areas and nesting sites. Fishing boats need to display license in a predesignated colour. The Coast Guard also suggested that fishing licenses must incorporate maps showing prohibited areas (ie. tribal areas, turtle areas and protected areas), list of life saving equipment on board and a list and pictorial chart of protected marine species. The Coast Guard toll free number 1718 can be printed on the license. There also needs to be an effective procedure to punish boats for violation of laws.

Depredation of eggs

The menace of dogs in inhabited and uninhabited islands was highlighted. It was suggested that it should be made illegal for fishermen to take dogs to uninhabited islands. The sterilization of dogs in inhabited islands, ultrasonic frequency to repel dogs,

and use of fire crackers/sound scares or a combination of the above methods, were suggested. Similarly, pigs need to be kept away from nesting beaches as well. The depredation of eggs by humans also had to be addressed by education and awareness programmes.

Other issues

An island marine environment protection committee with Coast Guard, Forest and Fisheries Departments, Navy and NGOs was mooted. It was recommended that there should be a common format for collection of information on turtle nesting, incorporating all details. Unexplored islands should be surveyed in a phased manner and work by Forest Department should be published. A turtle monitoring cell could be established to serve as a node for information about sea turtles.

The need for education and awareness was stressed. It was suggested that combined community interaction with Forest and Fisheries Departments and the Coast Guard would be helpful. Turtle camps and turtle walks, production of awareness material and involving volunteers could promote awareness about sea turtle conservation in the islands.

In reaction to the discussions and recommendations of the group, the Chief Wildlife Warden responded that a state level environmental committee had been established. A no plastic zones was to be declared. All fishermen were to procure licenses by October 1, 2003. Following a Supreme court judgment, sand mining was to be reduced to 30% and then phased out.

The Principal of the Forest Training School offered that the trainees of the school would undertake the task of translating the MCBTs "Beach management and Hatchery Programmes" manual into Hindi for use by the local Forest Department staff.

The workshop was attended by officers from the Indian Navy, Indian Coast Guard, scientists from Central Agricultural Research Institute, National Institute of Ocean Technology, Fisheries and Forest Department officers, and a batch of trainees of the Forest Training School, Andamans. The resource persons included Kartik Shanker, Aparna Singh, Shreyas Krishnan and Harry V. Andrews (ANET), Ravi Shankaran (SACON), Mr. Yesu Ratnam, Principal, A & N Forest Training School, and Mr. M.Grahamdurai, DCF, A & N Forest Department.