

## A SURVEY OF NESTING OLIVE RIDLEY SEA TURTLE IN CHENNAI COAST

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### Introduction

Sea turtles are large marine reptiles that have survived for at least 120 million years. Having evolved from land based ancestors these large reptiles need to complete their breeding cycle on land. The olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) is the smallest of sea turtles off the coast of India and is the sea turtle most often found in Chennai. In the month of December the adult turtles migrate large distances and assemble near the coast of Chennai to breed. After fertilization the gravid female crawls ashore to dig a flask shaped nest in the sand with her back flippers. Close to a hundred eggs are laid in the nest before the female covers the nest and returns to sea. The eggs are incubated by the sun's heat and hatchlings emerge after 54 to 56 days. They immediately dash towards the sea in the cool of the night to escape predators like feral dogs, crabs and owls. There are predators in the sea also and very few hatchlings attain maturity. This is nature's way of maintaining a balance in the adult population since a greater survival rate will lead to over population.