



Marine turtle update - India

In early 1982 our Research Officer J. Vijaya photographed hundreds of Pacific ridley sea turtles being taken off to market from Digha Beach in West Bengal. India Today, India's equivalent of Time Magazine published a few of these pictures with a brief on what the totally protected status of Schedule I on India's Wildlife Protection Act really means in the field. Soon after, a letter campaign was initiated by Dr. Nicholas Mrosovsky of the IUCN Marine Turtle Group and Mrs. Gandhi received letters from all over the world appealing for careful management of a valuable resource. The fact that the turtles were caught while breeding off the Orissa coast where there is a massive annual arribada (with over 150,000 females coming up to lay on a 15 km. beach in three days), made it all the more imperative to stop it. Events for sea turtle conservation which happened following this publicity are:

- a) Enforcement by the authorities (Forest Department and Police) in West Bengal has at least slightly curtailed the turtle smuggling which has gone underground. Turtles are now stored in ponds away from the beach and are transported at night according to Vijaya who made a return visit in early 1983.
- b) Increased interest by the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (Cochin) which came out with a special publication on sea turtles (see references).
- c) The Tamil Nadu Forest Department set up 5 hatcheries, between January and April 1983 on the coast between Madras and Ramswaram.
- d) The Department of Environment constituted an "Indian Sea Turtle Specialist Group" with the following members:
 1. Shri J.C. Daniel, Member
Indian Board for Wildlife Chairman
 2. Shri Romulus Whitaker, Director
Madras Snake Park Trust
 3. Shri S. Bhaskar, Naturalist
 4. Shri Chandrasekar Kar, Research Officer
Crocodile Breeding Project, Orissa
 5. A representative of Director,
Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta
 6. Dr. E.G. Silas, Director
CMFRI, Cochin

7. Dr. E.G. Silas

8. Shri Romulus Whitaker

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