

Study of *Trionyx nigricans* commences in Bangladesh.

Farid Ahsan, a lecturer in the Department of Zoology, University of Chittagong, Bangladesh has commenced a research project on *Trionyx nigricans*, a 'sacred' softshelled turtle apparently endemic to a single temple tank in Chittagong, and consequently, one of the rarest and least known freshwater checlonians in the world (if proved to be a valid species-R.W.). In a recent letter Farid says he is carrying out weekly counts and juveniles collected from the "Byazid Bostani Mazar's hilly area" are feeding in the laboratory. Plastic numbered tags supplied by the Crocodile Bank could not be used unfortunately, due to the religious protection the turtles enjoy.

(See page 247 of the IUCN Amphibia - Reptilia Red Data Book, Part I, 1982 for an account of this species.)

Note on observations at the Olive ridley rookery at Gahirmatha, Orissa

The following notes are based on observations made during my visit in January/February 1984 (see Hamadryad 9(2) p. 12).

1. The use of unshaded petromax lamps and bright torches should be carefully controlled during the arribada period. Campsites must be situated behind the sand dunes and all lights dimmed and/or shaded.
2. The Research Officer should be given further support in terms of equipment and personnel (i.e. he has no adequate camera, film, typewriter, two way VHF radio or assistant officer).
3. It is agreed that the casuarina planting and palisade construction by the coastal protection wing of the Orissa Forest Dept. is ill advised when it actually impinges on the nesting beach such as is happening at Habali Khati. Erosion and cyclone damage is certainly an important factor to consider (see No.6) but more study is urgently indicated into this problem.
4. Regarding tagging, it is felt that if the Orissa Forest Dept. can supply the trained personnel to do the job well, they should be encouraged to continue the programme at Gahirmatha and extend the tagging programme to the other Orissa mass nesting beaches. If the Dept. has any difficulties in maintaining the programme they could seek the help of CMFRI which will be responsible for the tagging programme throughout the rest of India.

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5. It is reported that the second arribada took place between 24/3/84 and 7/4/84 with an estimated 8 lakhs females coming ashore to lay during this period. The fact that this figure is more than double of any of the previous estimates indicates how much we have yet to learn about the ridley population. For example, could these large numbers possibly reflect a response to the protection of the nesting beach which started in 1976? Eight years may be enough time for the 1976 survivors to have matured and there are indications from Thiruvanniyur beach in Madras and Bentota in Sri Lanka that ten years of egg protection and hatchling releases have paid off, though quantitative data is lacking. Again, research is indicated. The second arribada coincides with the hatching of the nests of the first arribada. Forest staff observed hundreds (or perhaps thousands) of hatchling turtles being crawled over by emerging and returning adult females while the hatchlings tried to make their way to the sea. The hatching was reported on by WWF worker Indrancil Das from Calcutta, in a short note in "Hamadryad" (9 No.2, p 12)

6. Satish Bhaskar visited Gahirmatha during April and reported that one entire section of the beach had been destroyed by wave action. The erosion of the sand had exposed literally thousands of nests and Satish has pictures of lakhs of eggs lying along the shoreline and floating in the sea. The whole dynamic pattern of events at Gahirmatha really deserves much more scientific input than it is receiving now.

7. Because of the many difficulties experienced in apprehending, remanding and convicting turtle poachers (even with the welcome help of the Coast Guard) it is essential that the Digha, Howrah and Siliguri links in the sea turtle trade be snapped by efficient land based policing at these three despatch and wholesale marketing centers.

8. It is suggested that a preliminary analysis of the available data be made and various extrapolations carried out concerning the commercial management of the Orissa ridley population. While implementation of a management programme may be premature, the exercise will indicate what data needs further collection and which options may be the most appropriate.

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P.S. Submitted at last Sea Turtle Specialist Group Meeting  
in Delhi.