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MRS GANDHI WRITES ABOUT TURTLES

Professor Archie Carr, Chairman of the Marine Turtle Group, received the following letter from Mrs Gandhi after he had requested her help to protect turtles in India:

"I have received your letter of the 11th March. There have been other similar letters about the protection of marine turtles. Even before these reports were received last year, I called for immediate action through the Orissa State Government and the Coast Guard of the Indian Navy to prevent the hunting of these turtles or for collection of eggs by beachcombers. All coastal States in our country have been asked to be vigilant in this matter. You will be glad to know that our States have also started taking steps to collect the eggs and get them hatched in a central hatchery and release the young ones into the sea. We are aware of the importance of the endangered species to our eco-systems."

"Our concerned Ministries here and in the State Governments have been asked to take the required measures to see that the olive ridley turtle, which is an endangered species, is looked after."

Saving the Ridley turtle in Sundarbans - India

The Olive Ridley (Lepidochelys olivacea) starts visiting the Sundarbans (West Bengal) beaches from the first week of December. Eggs are predated by humans (H. sapiens) water monitors (V. salvator) and wild pig (Sus scrofa). Hatchlings are devoured by sea gulls, whiskered terns, brahminy kites and other predators; there are also reports of the cunning Sundarbans tiger lying camouflaged in the sand, waiting for female Ridelys to start laying.

In order to raise hatching survival, a search for Ridley nests are carried out in March/83 in a barren island of about 1.5 sq. km. area facing the Bay of Bengal, a number of nests were located. Three clutches were dug up on 4.3.83 following the flipper trails of the turtle. A slightly older nest containing 127 eggs and two 24 hour old nests containing 179 eggs were also collected in iron buckets with sand. Nest temperature was 28°C. The eggs were brought by motor launch to Sajnakhali, a distance of more than 100 kms. On 5.3.83 the eggs were buried in 45 cm deep artificial egg chambers in sand pit. Nest temperatures were recorded at noon and are given below:

Temp. (C°) at 12 noon

	<u>5.3.83</u>	<u>12.3.83</u>	<u>26.3.83</u>	<u>20.4.83</u>	<u>26.4.83</u>	<u>1.5.83</u>	<u>2.5.83</u>
Pit 1=	24°	27°	27°	30°	31½°	30°	-
Pit 2=	24°	27°	27°	29½°	30°	31°	30°
Pit 3=	24°	27°	27°	29½°	29½°	30°	30°

The first hatchling appeared on 2.5.83, i.e. on the 59th day after collection of eggs. Out of 485 eggs (127+179+179) collected, 248 hatched (51%) as per the following schedule(2)