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THE MARINE FISHERIES INFORMATION SERVICE: Technical and Extension Series envisages the rapid dissemination of information on marine and brackish water fishery resources and allied data available with the National Marine Living Resources Data Centre (NMLRDC) and the Research Divisions of the Institute, results of proven researches for transfer of technology to the fish farmers and industry and of other relevant information needed for Research and Development efforts in the marine fisheries sector.

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CONSERVATION OF MARINE TURTLES IN ANDHRA PRADESH*

Different organisations in India like Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute, Cochin, Forest Departments of Tamilnadu, Orissa and West Bengal are actively engaged with sea turtle conservation programmes. Valuable survey work has been carried out on sea turtles in Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Bhaskar, 1984). Recently, Whitaker and Kar (1984) reported a number of major and minor nesting beaches of olive ridley sea turtles. According to them, minor nesting of olive ridleys occurs in Andhra Pradesh. Silas *et al.* (1984) viewed that while migrating to reach the nesting grounds along the Orissa coast (Gahirmatha coast), stray numbers of ridley may be digressing to the shores of Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh. There is an urgency to survey along the Andhra Pradesh coast to locate nesting beaches of sea turtles, since no systematic survey work has been undertaken on this coast (Kar, 1983).

During a preliminary survey (Feb. 11-18, 1984) along the Andhra Pradesh coast, in a 25 km stretch from Kakinada (16°57'N, 82°12'E) to Konapakapeta, it was reported by fishermen that nesting of sea turtles (vernacular name of all species: *Samadrapu Tabeu*) occurred in the area and if they happened to see turtle tracks they digged the nests to take away the eggs for food. Through the survey it came to know that a number of olive ridleys nest in this coast.

I found a nesting beach of olive ridleys on Hope Island (Fig. 1), 7 nautical miles east to Kakinada, A.P. where nine predated nests were located. No undisturbed nests were found. According to fishermen, this island is a good nesting site for ridleys but majority of the nests were either predated by jackals or searched by the fishermen of the Island for the eggs. The author happened to see two fishermen on the Island searching for eggs on 18th February at 5.30 A.M. The fishermen are completely unaware of the wildlife protection laws.

Exporting of marine turtles was not reported in this coast but a section of fishermen known as 'Oda Baljees' eat the turtle meat. On 12-2-1984, a ridley turtle (69 cm carapace length) was killed and the local

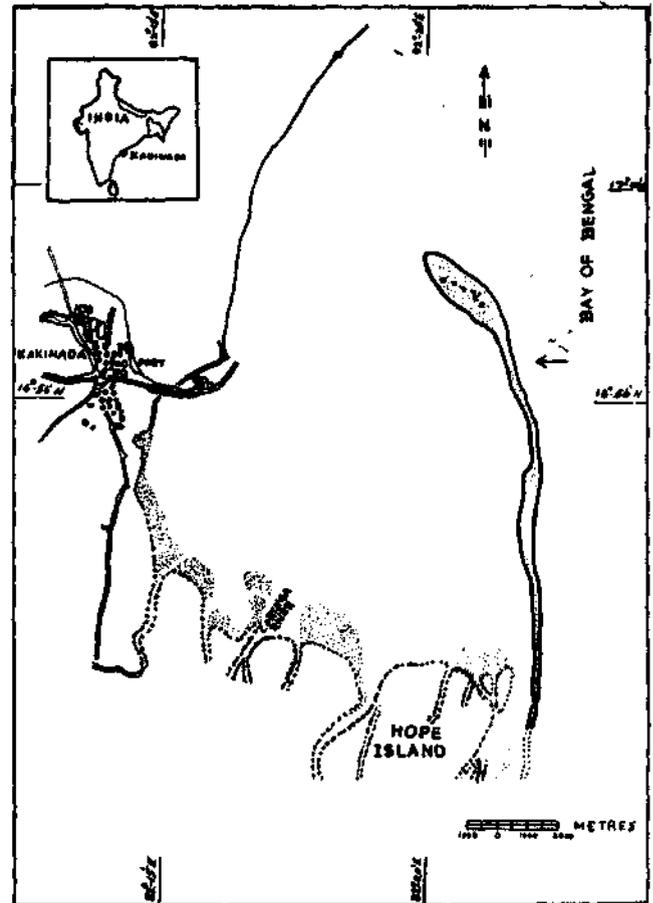


Fig. 1. Olive ridley nesting beach (arrow point) on Hope Island near Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh. Note the mouth of Coringa river. This river is declared as a crocodilian sanctuary.

fishermen at Mulapata, 20 km north to Kakinada, consumed the meat. The carapace was found on the following day. Mating turtles in the sea and females on the shore are habitually caught by the fishermen.

Incidental catch of breeding adults by fishing trawlers is more on this coast. Many carcasses of ridley were found which were reported to be caught by mechanised trawlers along this coast, where 1,207 registered trawlers move every day. The owners of the trawlers told that a number of sea turtles were incidentally caught in their nets from October to February.

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In Andhra Pradesh, Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary, 20 km south to Kakinada was declared in July, 1978 to rehabilitate the Saltwater crocodile, *Crocodylus porosus* which is believed to be absent in that area.

It is suggested that the conservation programme of marine turtles near Kakinada coast and Hope Island should be included in the conservation management programme of Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary. The sanctuary boundaries should be extended and inshore use of trawlers and fishing nets during mating and nesting season of Olive ridleys in the sanctuary should be regulated by instructing the port and fisheries departments. Fishing nets should be specially designed to avoid incidental catch of the turtles. Under the sanctuary management programme, sea turtle recovery programme in Andhra Pradesh should be started, as in Tamilnadu, by constructing turtle hatcheries in important nesting sites like Hope Island to incubate eggs under protected conditions.

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