

Sea turtle conservation in India: existing laws and problems – A case study from Gulf of Mannar, Southeast coast of India

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Olive ridley, Green, Hawksbill, Leatherback and Loggerhead turtles have been found to occur along the Indian coast. The Gulf of Mannar, located along the Southeast coast of India is a marine biosphere reserve and is unique for coral, seaweed and sea grass ecosystems. Gulf of Mannar is also an important place wherein all the five species of sea turtles have been reported. The survey indicated that the turtles were abundant along Gulf of Mannar coast in 1960s and 1970s. This could be evidenced from the live turtle trade existed in this coast in 1960s with Sri Lanka with an annual landing of about 3000 to 4000 turtles between Rameswaram and Mimisal. Also, turtle poisoning have been reported along this coast. After the enactment of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, the exploitation has got much reduced. Though all the five species are legally protected under Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, the exploitation is still continuing along the Tuticorin coast of the Gulf of Mannar. The turtle number has got reduced along this coast in recent years due to habitat disturbance and exploitation. Green turtle is the much exploited species for the meat and the fisher folk are offered lucrative price by the turtle meat traders. Four green turtles have been recently rescued from the traders and released back into the sea. Though the present law is enough to contain the exploitation, shortage of manpower and facilities for its effective implementation are considered as the major lacuna for the continuing turtle exploitation apart from the lack of awareness among the coastal people.

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