

THE SEA TURTLE REPORT FOR THE SEASON
2007–2008 FROM THE COAST OF
VISAKHAPATNAM URBAN TO BHEEMILI

I-INTRODUCTION:

We are in our 12th year of our field campaign of Sea Turtle Protection. Before we began our project the endangered Sea Turtles of this region were subjected to innumerable methods of destruction.

With our sustained determination, commitment and extreme persuasion combined strongly with field protection, turning the poachers into protectors, lobbying with the related Government Departments, networking with other Animal Welfare Organizations, application of religious sentiments and comprehensive innovative awareness and education sustained campaigns with the related fishing villages the result has been extremely advantageous and has greatly helped Visakha Urban Beaches up to the areas of Pudimadaka and Bheemili beaches for the protection and conservation of the Sea Turtles.

This year we have been very fortunate as for the first time we received a grant exclusively for Sea Turtle protection from the Rufford Foundation. This grant has made us plan our programs more systematically, with more resources allowing us to cover more territory and spend more time with more communities at the village level for creating awareness and educating all sections and ages of the village people.

Every year the beaches where the sea turtles nest are losing their place due to beach and tourist based development and government projects on the beaches and of course the unending expansion of the human population. These are issues that need more time and attention that we have been insisting on the past 11 years. With priority given to this important and sensitive program and hopefully this will be in place starting this season with possible support from you all!

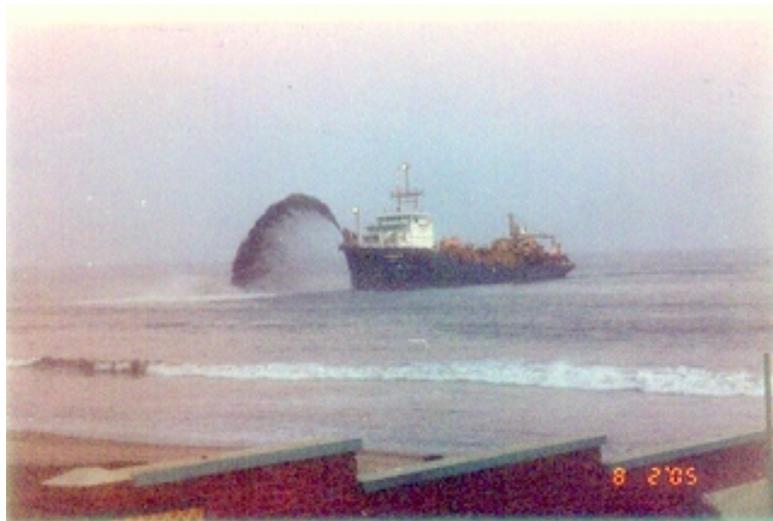
Most surprisingly, the nestings in the most disturbed areas has increased by 20% and this brings into fold the fact that the Sea Turtles are in desperate need of a comprehensive protection guaranteed during the nesting seasons.

Therefore we are looking at all the angles involving many stakeholders for this co-operation and co-ordination.

II- FACING THE ISSUES: -

This season we encountered the following hindrances while trying to protect the Sea Turtles of this region:

- 1) Industrial Pollution at the beaches of Tikkavanipallem, Pudimadaka, Dibbapalem...that resulted in the deaths of hundreds of the unfortunate Sea Turtles during the important nesting period
- 2) The Government and the concerned ministry have categorically and finally concluded to allow private partnerships to dig the beach sand for extraction of a chemical for the development of nuclear energies. This is a black soil at the beaches of Visakhapatnam, Bheemili and Srikakulam. The safety of this operation has not considered for allowing the breeding of sea turtles.



3) Entertainment at the beach has tremendously increased with total chaos almost every day there by causing destruction and disturbance for sea turtle breeding. Such entertainment based tourist developments have made the authorities disregard the issue of protection for this species. They have gone to the extent of disturbing the entire length of the beach by building and encouraging contractors to put up powerful lights along the beach sand with different kinds of resorts



4) Unmindful and with disregard for biological balance, the government authorities have allowed the exploitation of the entire hills on the beach front by putting up film studios and hotels. The four by lane highway to go to up to 30 Kms to Bheemili and a further up to the city of Kakinada Port with an ambitious sea corridor project, is now dangerously poised and can upset sea turtle protection.

5) Despite stringent Law developed by the Fishing Industry towards the compulsory usage of Tutler Excluder Devices (TED's) to be used by the mechanized and fishing boats to allow sea turtles caught in the nets to escape - - - this problem still exists with majority of the boats as they are not implementing the TED models which are also provided with free of cost. This is because they fear loss of catch when the sea turtle escapes from the TED net.

6) Because of the tremendous increase towards development on the beach and setting up on the resorts there is abnormal food available in our open garbage system which has allowed a strong contingent of beach dogs that threaten to destroy not only the eggs and hatchlings but also pose great risk to the lives of the mother Sea Turtle when she comes for nesting.”

III-TACKLING THE ISSUES:

a) INDUSTRIAL POLLUTION:

Visakhapatnam is being regarded as the “Jewel of East India” and “the most happening city in India.” All kind of major industries and Thermal Power Stations are located in the vicinities of the beach. Visakhapatnam is also a place for the formation of the Pharmaceuticals Park. The settings up of such chemical industries in the cities are located in the vicinity of the beach. Also, Visakhapatnam is a home to major shrimp hatcheries. These are all major contributors for the pollution of the area.

We have launched a campaign after ascertaining the facts that there was excessive nitrogen in the sea water, which has been considered to be very toxic. The testing was doubly done at the authentic Forensic Laboratory and the reputed Government Laboratory of Hyderabad. These have been submitted to the Pollution Control Board and they have considered to send a team to verify and take necessary remedial measures. The Forest Department also has been sensitized to the issue requesting for their necessary action.

See article in the Hindu:

<http://www.thehindu.com/2008/03/25/stories/2008032553420300.htm>

We are hopeful of positive action and attitude from the concerned related authorities at the earliest and hoping that immediate measures would be taken up so this is never repeated again.

We continue to pursue the matter and keep up close contact in this regard. However, we feel that this should be another part of compulsory action along with other methods that we are following to save the sea turtles.

(below photos of sea turtles severely ill)





SAND MINING:

Since 1998 the issue of sand mining has been under discussion with the Government to accord permission for digging of beach sand which action was under suspension for the last 10 years due to our constant report and persuasion that the sea turtles nestings here are an important sporadic nesting happening in this region which cannot be ignored. However, the last year have seen renewed activities for the sand mining in the Coastal Regions of Srikakulam and Visakhapatnam Districts. We have once again brought strong objections and the sand mining issue stands to withdraw as of now. This season's report will once again go to the government authorities to be considered for proper assessment of the areas that will not be disturbing to the sea turtle nesting grounds.

c) ENTERTAINMENT ON THE BEACH:

Every player in the market would want to make fast money out of the natural resources exploiting the conditions without any consideration towards the protection of the environment. The abnormal rise in the human population and the consequent exploitation at the beach has made the resultant effect of entertaining in various modes and methods and innovations to lure people at a price. This has been a disastrous effect to the sea turtles especially during the seasonal breeding times. The disturbances are compounded with the consequent effect of infrastructure development for facilitating the safety and security and improving the entertainment effects. Which includes setting up of powerful

lighting of the beaches, every 500 yards has sewage out lets into the sea and very heavy pollution on the beach due to discarded materials.

Our action in this regard has been to appeal to authorities to keep the beach clean, to shade the lights that will distract the mother and the hatchlings, to consider putting off the major entertainment programs in the beaches during the breeding seasons and also to allow the development with the infrastructure on the beaches for allowances of enough space for the sea turtles to breed.

This issue has been going on four years and every time we have had to continuously remind the authorities. They have followed our appeal in part but it was difficult for them in the light of huge visitors to the beaches unfortunately at the same time of the sea turtle breeding.

However, regarding this as a blessing in disguise we have carried out our Awareness Education campaign at these places and we are happy to note that the people concerned also participate with all due precautions from our interactions and they do greatly inform us and our watch an of any sea turtle nesting incidences. It is now a community responsible participation.



d) EXPLOITATION OF BEACH HILLS:

The most indirect means of disturbing the Sea Turtle nesting at the beach is because of severe exploitation of the hills located facing the spectacular beaches. Exploitation have gone to extent that precaution has not been adhered to the norms of maintaining proper drainage and hygienic. Not only by exploiting the hills, which robs away the utility of the hills, there is huge influx of people into this region as a part of tourism and this is leading to serious consequences to the nesting of sea turtle on the beaches.

To this extent our effort has been to coordinate with other NGO and Fishermen NGOs fighting to save the environment and protection of the livelihood of the fishermen. We have joined the campaign another issue to fight the battle legally.

e) NON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SEA TURTLE DEVICE:

This has been a contentious issue since a long time and despite the very strict laws made by the Fishing Industry 90% of the boats do not implement the use of the important device that can save many lives of the sea turtle in the open seas.

We have been continuously holding meetings, conducting seminars and workshops along with the Forest Department and the Boat and Trawlers Associations. We have carried out joint education campaigns of fishing villages and at the fishing harbor. Our efforts continue vigorously in this regard.

f) BEACH DOGS:

The beach dogs are one of the major predators for the mother sea turtle, eggs and hatchlings. The beach dogs thrive very healthily because of strong availability of good food and with many new tourist hotels.

Under our Animal Birth Control for the Street Dogs, we have set up specific specialized dog catching techniques for spaying and neutering all the beach dogs for immediate impact.

IV. GRATEFUL SUPPORT:

1. RUFFORD FOUNDATION:

The season 2007-08 has definitely boosted our efforts to consolidate and expand more areas with more innovative implementation specifically towards education and awareness campaigns with the grant from Rufford Foundation.

http://www.ruffordsmallgrants.org/rsg/projects/pradeep_kumar_nath

We were able to project for the first time methodically touching all the stakeholders very firmly in observing their related measures to help the conservation of these endangered species.

Our concept of sea turtle protection has been well received and appreciated at the Pan-Pacific-Asian conference held at Auckland, New Zealand from 27th June to 3rd July'2008.

2. HSBC-EARTH WATCH:

We are also tremendously thankful for Earth Watch for selecting VSPCA for extending protection to the sea turtle which plays a big role in the oceanic life cycle.

3. ANDHRA PRADESH FOREST DEPARTMENT AND ANDHRA PRADESH GOVERNMENT FISHERIES DEPARTMENT:

With the cooperation and coordination of the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department and Fisheries Department, Central Marine Fisheries, it

was made possible with their inputs knowledge for making it into a comprehensive all round protection.

The Andhra Pradesh Forest Department has always been a part of our joint efforts and we are grateful for their support.

4. **NETWORKING:**

We would surely need the support of all different NGOs working for the cause directly or indirectly. It provides us a background to strengthen our base of requirements and project a unified stance.

In this regard, we uphold and justify the cause of our fishermen brethren and join hands in support against the various abnormal beach developments.

There has a been a great success as:

- ❖ Not bringing in the warship on the beachfront.
- ❖ Constructing of the four-by-lane landward side instead of the earlier planned seaward side.
- ❖ Stopping of sand mining here
- ❖ Bringing down pollution.

However, there are many other issues that we have to struggle to stop and these are under very influential quarters. We will do our best to provide a safer environment.

V. STATISTICAL DATA:

REPORT 2007-08

PLACE	NO. OF NESTINGS	DEATHS
1. COAST GUARD to VUDA	154	5
2. VUDA to ENDADA	174	2
3. ENDADA to BHEEMILI	69	4
4. BHEEMILI to ANNAVARAM	79	NA
TOTAL	476	11

VI- INCREDIBLE INCREASE IN NESTINGS:

Comparing to the last year there is a marked noticeable increase in the nestings and more so in the most disturbed areas.

Whereas, last year there was some migration from the most disturbed areas to secluded areas.

It is difficult for us to explain this phenomenon but gives us a lot of ground to appeal and prepare for a serious outlook towards sea turtle protection, which are an endangered category of life.

It is our appeal to the government that plans are made afoot in considering our efforts and provides the sea turtles protectionary objectives a reason to execute.

VII- CLOSING OBSERVATION AND PLEDGE FOR THE FUTURE:

The hindrance are many, varied serious and more every year. Every year the places for the nestings are shrinking due to very obvious reasons enumerated.

On the other hand our sustained campaign has made huge impact and made sea turtle a household name and no more cruelties or poachings by human. Our efforts are being felt now and needs more effort to consolidate and expand and needs the work of many issues to be dealt with to make an impact.

We will continue to work in that direction and take motivation from the good nestings and end result. We also hope that we will be on the radar of benevolent donors and sponsors to help us with the important resource that make our pans achieve the target and realize the objectives.

Our fervent appeal goes out to the Rufford Foundation to make it an associate of this project with VSPCA allowing the continuation of the project with more renewed vigour.