

Olive Ridley Turtles

[UPSC Notes]

Why tag Olive Ridley Turtles?

As we have mentioned above, 1,556 Olive Ridley Turtles have been tagged at the mass nesting sites- Rushikulya Coast, Gahirmatha, and Devi River.

- The tagging of Olive Ridley Turtles helps to track the movements of these turtles which would further enhance the protection of these endangered turtles.
- In this process, metal tags are attached to the turtles which are non-corrosive. These tags can be easily removed later and they don't cause any harm to the turtles.
- These tags are uniquely numbered, and they contain information about the country code, organization's name, and email address.
- So, if other researchers come across the tagged Olive Ridley Turtles then they will transmit the latitude and longitude information to Indian researchers.
- This action would aid the researchers in identifying the migration pattern and places visited by marine reptiles following nesting and congregation.

What are Olive Ridley Turtles?

Olive Ridley Turtles are the smallest sea turtles found in the world. These turtles got their name from olive-colored carapace.

Olive Ridley Turtles are popular for their mass nesting known as Arribada, in which thousands of females gather on the same beach to lay their eggs.

Habitat of Olive Ridley Turtles

- They can be found in the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans.
- The Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary, Odisha is home to the world's largest sea turtle rookery.

Protection Status of Olive Ridley Turtles

- IUCN Red List: Vulnerable

- Schedule I of Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972
- CITES Appendix I

Facts about Olive Ridley Turtles

Check out some facts about Olive Ridley Turtles below

- The major nesting sites for Olive Ridley Turtles in India are Rushikulya rookery coast (Odisha), the mouth of the Debi River, Gahirmatha beach (Bhitarkanika National park)
- Scientific Name of Olive Ridley Turtle- *Lepidochelys olivacea*. They are also known as Pacific ridley sea turtles.
- Presence- Olive Ridley Turtles are found in the warm water of the Pacific, Atlantic, and Indian oceans.
- Olive Ridley Turtles choose the right kind of nesting beaches around the river mouths. The Odisha coast has the right kind of beaches, the deltaic areas with sand pits on this coast are perfect for turtles' nesting sites.
- Olive Ridley Olive Ridley Turtles seek a certain latitude for nesting. A beach at a latitude around 25 degrees is suitable for these turtles.
- After hatching, the turtles leave their eggs and swim away.

Olive Ridley Turtle Mass Nesting in India

Gahirmatha beach off the Bay of Bengal coast in Kendrapara, Odisha is the world's largest nesting ground for Olive Ridley Turtles.

- The first nesting of Olive Ridley Turtles was spotted in 1974. It was in Gahirmaths rookret,
- The second mass nesting was discovered in 19981 at Devi River mouth.
- For the 3rd time, mass nesting was discovered in 1994 at the Rushikulya river mouth.
- From November to December, Olive Ridley Turtles come to the Odisha coast and they stay there up to March and April for nesting.
- A female turtle can lay 100-140 eggs at a time.

Threats on Olive Ridley Turtles

As per the Government, the threats to Olive Ridley Turtles are as follows:

- Marine pollution and waste.
- These turtles have high demand due to their meat, shells, eggs, and leather.
- Modification of the nesting beaches

- Fishing with gill nets, and establishment of fishing bases at the nesting sites and breeding areas,
- Eggs or nests are destroyed by predators like hyenas, dogs, etc, and by beach erosion.
- Growing plastics and other garbage thrown by tourists and fishermen

Initiatives to Protect Olive Ridley Turtle

The government takes initiatives to protect the Olive Ridley Turtle. The major initiatives are given below.

Operation Olivia

Operative Olivia is a project carried out by the Indian Coast Guard. It began for the protection of Olive Ridley Turtles as they come to the Odisha coast for nesting and breeding. Every year "Operation Olivia" is carried out from November to December.

Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs)

Odisha government has made it mandatory for trawls to use Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) to reduce the accidental killing in India. Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs) is a net designed with an exit cover that would allow the turtles to escape while retaining the catch.

Odisha Government Initiatives

- In Odisha, 50% of the total world population of Olive Ridley Turtles can be seen, and almost 90% of the Indian population of sea turtles.

To protect the Olive Ridley Turtles, Odisha Marine Fisheries Regulation Act (OMFRA) 1982 and Odisha Marine Fisheries Regulation Rules, 1983 have announced that fishing won't be allowed in the coastal water off Devi and Rushikulya rocket during the breeding season.