Preparing the Chennai Coast for Olive Ridley Turtles: Conservation Drive Ahead of the Nesting Season



Original symbolic illustration: pcsmantra.com

Why in the news

Ahead of the annual migration and nesting season of Olive Ridley turtles (expected from December 2026), the Tamil Nadu Forest Department has begun conservation measures along the Chennai coast. The Chennai Wildlife Division has started beach patrols from Marina Beach to Neelankarai and Uthandi; the Pulicat range will conduct similar patrols along the Pulicat coast. The Marine Elite Force (MEF), in coordination with the Fisheries Department, is monitoring trawlers through boat patrols to ensure compliance with fishing restrictions in sensitive waters - accidental entanglement in fishing nets is a major threat to the turtles.

Outline of the conservation measures

Patrols: Two-to-three-hour beach patrols, three to four times a week; special focus on known turtle nesting stretches.
Demarcation of sensitive stretches: Removing obstacles to nesting and regular beach cleaning.
Training volunteers: Training in turtle conservation, identification of nesting sites and reporting procedures, so that intervention can be immediate in case of a threat.

The Olive Ridley turtle: identity and status

Introduction: The Olive Ridley (scientific name: Lepidochelys olivacea) is the smallest of all sea turtle species; it gets its name from the olive-green colour of its carapace (shell). An adult measures 62-70 cm and weighs about 35-45 kg.

Conservation status: Listed in **Schedule I** of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972; categorised as **Vulnerable** on the IUCN Red List.

Arribada: The species is famous for its synchronised mass nesting called 'arribada' (Spanish for 'arrival'), in which thousands of female turtles come ashore together to lay eggs within a span of a few days. Odisha hosts the world's largest mass nesting sites for the species - Gahirmatha, Rushikulya and the Devi river mouth. On the Chennai coast, turtles nest solitarily; radio-tagging studies show that turtles regularly return to the Chennai coast.

Way forward

During the nesting season (December-April), curbs on coastal light pollution, plastic and trawler activity will be essential. Volunteer-based monitoring and the participation of the fishing community will decide the success of this year's campaign.

Frequently asked questions

Q1: What is the conservation status of the Olive Ridley turtle?
Answer: Listed in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, and 'Vulnerable' on the IUCN Red List.

Q2: What is an arribada?
Answer: The synchronised mass nesting of Olive Ridley turtles, in which thousands of females come ashore together to lay eggs within a few days.

Q3: Where are the major mass nesting sites of Olive Ridleys in India?
Answer: In Odisha - Gahirmatha, Rushikulya and the Devi river mouth.

Prelims practice questions

Question 1: Consider the following statements with reference to the Olive Ridley turtle:
Statement 1: It is the largest sea turtle species
Statement 2: It is listed in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972
Statement 3: Its synchronised mass nesting phenomenon is called arribada

Which of the above statements are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer and explanation
Correct answer: (b)
Statement 1 is incorrect - the Olive Ridley is one of the smallest sea turtle species, not the largest (the leatherback is the largest)
Statements 2 and 3 are correct

Question 2: Which region of India is world-famous for the mass nesting (arribada) of Olive Ridley turtles?

(a) The northern coast of the Andaman Islands
(b) The Odisha coast - Gahirmatha, Rushikulya, Devi mouth
(c) The Rann of Kutch
(d) The lagoon chain of Lakshadweep

Answer and explanation
Correct answer: (b)
Odisha hosts the world's largest mass nesting sites of the Olive Ridley turtle

Sources

- Sea Turtles of India (species profile, conservation status): seaturtlesofindia.org
- Indian Coast Guard (Operation Olivia): indiancoastguard.gov.in

Related reading

- Promises on Biodiversity, the Question of Implementation: India's Path at COP17
- The Hindu: Chennai turtle conservation preparations, 16 November 2026