

Operation Olivia

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In news

In order to protect Olive Ridley Turtles, Indian Coast Guard started to enforce laws under Operation Olivia

About Operation Olivia

- The Indian Coast Guard's "Operation Olivia", initiated in the early 1980s, helps protect Olive Ridley turtles as they congregate along the Odisha coast for breeding and nesting from November to December.
- The operation is being conducted by the Indian Coast Guard every year
- Under this operation, round-the-clock surveillance is conducted from November till May utilising Coast Guard assets such as fast patrol vessels, air cushion vessels, interceptor craft and Dornier aircraft to enforce laws near the rookeries
- From November 2020 to May 2021, the Coast Guard devoted 225 ship days and 388 aircraft hours to protect 3.49 lakh turtles that laid eggs along the Odisha coast.
- Odisha has also formulated laws for protecting Olive Ridley turtles, and the Orissa Marine Fisheries Act empowers the Coast Guard as one of its enforcement agencies.

About the Olive Ridley turtle

- The Olive Ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) is listed as **vulnerable** under the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red list.
- All five species of sea turtles found in India are included in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, and in the Appendix I of the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna

and Flora (CITES), which prohibits trade in turtle products by signatory countries.

Nesting habits of Olive Ridley in India

- The Olive Ridley has one of the most extraordinary nesting habits in the natural world, including mass nesting called arribadas.
- The 480-km-long Odisha coast has three arribada beaches at Gahirmatha, the mouth of the Devi river, and in Rushikulya, where about 1 lakh nests are found annually.
- More recently, a new mass nesting site has been discovered in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, with more than 5,000 nests reported in a season
- Sea turtles generally return to their natal beach, or where they were born, to lay eggs as adults.
- Mating occurs in the offshore waters of the breeding grounds and females then come ashore to nest, usually several times during a season.
- They crawl ashore, dig a flask-shaped nest about 1.5 to 2 foot deep, and lay 100 to 150 eggs in each clutch. Hatchlings emerge from their nests together in about seven to 10 weeks.

Threats:

- Studies have found three main factors that damage Olive Ridley turtles and their eggs – heavy predation of eggs by dogs and wild animals, indiscriminate fishing with trawlers and gill nets, and beach soil erosion.
- Dense fishing activity along the coasts of Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and West Bengal, especially ocean-going trawlers, mechanised fishing boats and gill-netters pose a severe threat to turtles.

Measures taken

Coordination of efforts is done at various levels, including enforcing the use of turtle excluder devices (TED) by trawlers

in the waters adjoining nesting areas; prohibiting the use of gill nets on turtle approaches to the shore; and curtailing turtle poaching.

Extra

Reading:

<https://journalsofindia.com/olive-ridley-turtles/>

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