

## Olive Ridley Sea Turtle

*Prelims: Current events of national and international importance | Conservation*

### Why in News?

Wildlife Institute of India (WII) conducting a feasibility study on launching turtle tourism in Kerala.

- It is one of the ***smallest and most abundant sea turtles***, closely resembles the Kemp's ridley sea turtle, the other smallest sea turtle species.
- **Scientific Name** - *Lepidochelys olivacea*.
- **Genus** - *Lepidochelys*.
- **Habitat** - Olive Ridley turtles inhabit warm ***tropical and subtropical waters*** of the Pacific Ocean, Indian Ocean, Atlantic Ocean.
- They are primarily **pelagic (open-ocean dwellers)** but forage in coastal bays and estuaries and return to sandy beaches for nesting.

Global Distribution	Indian Distribution (Major)	Indian Distribution (Others)
<b>Major Mass Nesting (Arribada) Sites</b> - Mexico, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, West Africa, South America.	India hosts the <b>largest mass nesting populations in the world</b> , mainly along the coast of <b>Odisha</b> . <b>Major Mass Nesting Sites</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary</b> - largest rookery of Olive Ridley turtles in the world</li> <li>• <b>Rushikulya River Mouth</b></li> <li>• <b>Devi River Mouth</b></li> </ul>	<b>East Coast:</b> West Bengal (Lothian Island), Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu. <b>West Coast:</b> Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala <b>Islands:</b> Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep

*Rookery is a breeding or nesting ground where large numbers of animals gather to reproduce, commonly used for turtle nesting beaches.*

- **Nesting** -They exhibit a unique ***mass nesting*** behaviour known as ***Arribada Nesting*** (Spanish for “arrival”).
- Thousands of females **come ashore simultaneously to lay eggs**.
- This behaviour is found **only** in turtles of the ***Genus Lepidochelys***.
- Many females also practice ***solitary nesting***.
- These turtles undertake **long-distance migrations** between feeding grounds and nesting beaches.
  - **Nesting Season in India** - November - May, ***Peak mass nesting: (February - March)***
- **Morphology - Shell** - Heart-shaped olive-green carapace,
- Male turtles can be identified by longer tails extending beyond the shell (carapace).
- **Diet** - They are ***omnivorous***, feeding on Algae, crustaceans, mollusks, tunicates, jellyfish.
- **Major Threats** - Bycatch in fishing gear, Illegal harvesting of eggs and turtles, Marine pollution and plastic debris, Habitat loss and coastal development, Predation of eggs and hatchlings, Vessel strikes.
- **Conservation Status** - IUCN - Vulnerable.
- **CITES** - Appendix I (international trade prohibited).
- **Wildlife Protection Act, 1972** - Schedule I.
- **Bio Indicator Species** -Population trends serve as indicators of **ocean health and marine ecosystem changes**.

### ***Quick facts***

- **Operation Olivia** - Conducted by the **Indian Coast Guard**.
- Protects them during nesting season along the Odisha coast.
- Focuses on preventing illegal fishing and protecting nesting sites.
- **Turtle Excluder Device** - It is fitted in trawl fishing nets to allow trapped turtles to escape while retaining fish catch. Helps reduce accidental bycatch.
- Promoted in turtle nesting regions of India.

### **Reference**

[New Indian Express | Olive Ridley Turtles](#)



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