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)
Major Mass Nesting (Arribada) Sites - Mexico, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, West Africa, South America.	India hosts the **largest mass nesting populations in the world**, mainly along the coast of **Odisha**. **Major Mass Nesting Sites** • **Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary** – largest rookery of Olive Ridley turtles in the world • **Rushikulya River Mouth** • **Devi River Mouth**	**East Coast:** West Bengal (Lothian Island), Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu. **West Coast:** Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala **Islands:** 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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