

Sahyadri Nisarga Mitra - 2011-12





## **Marine Turtle Protection and Conservation**

### **Project Summary**

Sahyadri Nisarga Mitra started sea turtle nest protection through the ex-situ technique of hatchery management in the village of Velas, tal. Mandangad, dist. Ratnagiri in 2002. This year, the NGO completed 10 years of the successful implementation of the project. The project covered 22 villages in Raigad and Ratnagiri out of which nests were identified and protected in a total of ten villages- Velas, Kelshi, Anjarle, Kolthare, Dabhol, Guhagar and Tavsai in Ratnagiri and Diveagar, Maral and Harihareshwar in Raigad. 68 nests were protected and 3255 hatchlings released into the sea. Of these, the 6 nests at Tavsai were secured through in-situ conservation by erecting fenced enclosures around each nest.

Owing to Sahyadri Nisarga Mitra's persistent efforts, the local community expressed a willingness to participate in turtle conservation efforts in whatever manner possible. The incidence of poaching eggs has already gone down with regular patrolling of the nesting beaches and the involvement of the Forest Department in the project, not to speak of increased levels of awareness amongst the community. The community from a number of villages expressed a desire to host tourists through the medium of the Turtle Festival.

### **Turtle Festival**

This year, the Turtle Festival was organized in two villages- Velas in Ratnagiri and Maral in Raigad. While Velas has been hosting the Turtle Festival since 2006, this was the first year that the Festival was celebrated in the quiet village of Maral.

### **Velas Turtle Festival**

The Velas Turtle Festival went on for a period of two months from 19 February 2012 to 30 April 2012. Almost 2500 tourists turned up for this celebration of turtle conservation and 736 hatchlings were released from a total of 17 nests in this period. The Gram Panchayat has now stepped up for the management of the local body Kasav Mitra Mandal. The members of the Kasav Mitra Mandal provide accommodation and food facilities to tourists and in turn, dedicate a percent of their profits to the conservation of sea turtles in the village.

### **Maral Turtle Festival**

The Turtle Festival at Maral was celebrated with great enthusiasm by the residents here. The two-day fest attracted almost 120 tourists, who were accommodated by the villagers. A total of 34 hatchlings were released during the period. SNM hopes this is the beginning of a long and fruitful association for marine turtles and the local community.

## **Alternate Livelihoods through Turtle Conservation**

SNM undertook a socio-economic survey of Velas to identify community members and livelihoods activities that could be incorporated into its alternate livelihoods program. Buoyed by the success of this program and to commemorate the successful decade of turtle conservation in the village, SNM has decided to hand over the reins of the project to the local community of Velas. Next breeding season onwards, the community of the village will be responsible for organizing the Turtle Festival. The NGO will provide technical assistance as and when required, however, the villagers will handle the logistics and administration of the Festival.

## **International Volunteer Program with Raleigh Expedition**

Five batches of international volunteers from the Raleigh Expedition visited Sahyadri Nisarga Mitra's Marine turtle conservation project at the village of Velas in Ratnagiri district, Maharashtra, India.

During their assignment, the volunteers participated in the turtle conservation project including constructing the hatchery for ex-situ turtle conservation, working on the path leading to the hatchery, constructing stone steps and releasing turtle hatchlings of the Olive ridley into the sea. The volunteering program has helped spread the message of sea turtle conservation across the seas and has provided a welcome boost to this 10-year old campaign.

### **Awareness Programmes**

Wide-scale awareness programs were undertaken throughout the project areas addressing the issues of the importance of marine turtles in the ecology and the subsequent need to protect them. In addition, Save Turtle cricket tournaments were organized in 3 villages. Similarly, film screenings of the documentary 'Nisargache Dene' were arranged for local villagers in Velas, Maral and Harihareshwar. At Harihareshwar, SNM set up a stall over the weekend where devotees to the famous Hareshwar temple could learn more about the sea turtle conservation project along Konkan's coastline. A computer training class has also been initiated at Velas that aims to teach the computer to the local youth in the village.

### **Volunteer Training Workshop**

On 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> October 2011, SNM arranged a training workshop based on the turtle conservation technique of hatchery management at Velas. This workshop was aimed at imparting knowledge to volunteers interested in sea turtle conservation and to study the possibilities of expanding the project to new areas.

### **Vulture Conservation**

The vulture conservation program gained renewed momentum in the year 2011-12. The white-backed vulture *Gyps bengalensis* colony in Anjarle, tal. Dapoli was monitored throughout the breeding season for nesting. Two nests were observed at the start of the breeding season. Unfortunately, both nests failed. A vulture restaurant was established with the help of the Forest Department at Sukondi village near the Anjarle vulture colony. A total of 15 dead cattle were dumped in this compound in the breeding season, after ensuring that the carcasses were free of Diclofenac and pesticides. 20-25 vultures have been sighted in the area. Similarly wide-scale awareness campaigns were carried out throughout villages under the IBCN - BNHS sponsored project that focussed on mitigation of Diclofenac in Ratnagiri district. Meetings were held with veterinarians to convince them against the use of Diclofenac on domestic cattle. Chemists were also involved in the campaign through an attempt at prohibiting the sale of Diclofenac for veterinary purposes. White-backed vulture colonies at Chirgaon in Mhasala and Srivardhan were surveyed and breeding success, fledging ratio, number of nests etc. were noted. SNM intends to undertake regular monitoring of these breeding colonies in the future. SNM also intends to undertake monitoring for the breeding sites of the Long-billed vulture *Gyps indicus* which were regularly encountered during monitoring.

### **Education**

Sahyadri Nisarga Mitra conducted awareness campaigns through the medium of competitions, slideshows, film screenings, quizzes and nature trails for the youth throughout the project areas. We targeted a total of 17 schools and introduced students to the concepts of nature conservation

including marine turtles, vultures and other aspects of biodiversity. With the help of the Shri Shankarlal Pokarna Charitable Trust, a computer training class was initiated for children at Velas. Nature trails were also organized for the youth in Chiplun, with a view to improve local participation.

## **Conferences**

SNM Secretary, Mr. Bhau Katdare, was a special invitee to the GEF National Dialogue in Goa in September 2011, where he presented the marine turtle conservation project of Maharashtra. SNM representatives attended the annual TAG workshop consisting of sea turtle conservationists in India. SNM representatives also received training at the Marine Mammal Necropsy and Stranding Response workshop. In addition, SNM also attended the Civil Society from North-western Ghats network workshop organized by AERF.

## **Media coverage**

SNM's secretary Mr. Bhau Katdare represented Sahyadri Nisarga Mitra at an All India Radio interview based on the NGO's projects and the bird diversity of Konkan. SNM's work on marine turtles was recognized through articles in leading local and national newspapers and magazines.

## **Yashwant Yuva Fellowship**

With a view to introduce passionate individuals to conservation in the Indian scenario, the Yashwantrao Chavan Pratishthan in partnership with SNM has initiated the Fellowship in Chiplun.

## **Awards and Honors**

SNM had the honour of receiving the Vasundhara Mitra award at the Vasundhara International Film Festival.

## **What's New**

- ❖ With a view towards expansion of its nature conservation activities, SNM purchased 4 gunthas land for its office at Chiplun. We are now in the process of generating funds for setting up a full-fledged office here including a nature education centre, library and auditorium.
- ❖ To improve the alternate livelihoods through conservation model and to improve information levels about the Olive ridley, SNM will establish a state-of-the-art Marine turtle Knowledge and Information Centre at Maral. Here, in addition to turtle exhibits, training will be provided to locals in basic crafts like tailoring, article making etc.
- ❖ A Guide Training program will also be initiated at Harihareshwar with the support of the Harihareshwar temple trustees.

## **Acknowledgements**

This breeding season, the Maharashtra State Forest Department came forth and sponsored sea turtle conservation through hatchery management in 22 villages. It also sponsored the vulture conservation program through management of the vulture restaurant at Sukondi village in Dapoli. The vulture monitoring project was supported by IBCN – BNHS. The Save Turtle campaign of the Maharashtra State Government's Environment Department has greatly helped improve the visibility of the project. The Shri Shankarlal Pokarna Charitable Trust provided funds that assisted in improving awareness and promoting education at the local level. The project also received support from UNDP GEF SGP to arrange the international volunteering program of Raleigh Expedition. Under

this program Raleigh's volunteers contributed towards the spread of the idea of sea turtle conservation in foreign countries, besides working for the development of Velas with a view to make it more tourist-friendly. The Tata Consultancy Services supported the Turtle Festivals and subsequent awareness in Maral, Harihareshwar and Velas. In addition, the local Gram Panchayats in each village and Kasav Mitra Mandal, Velas have worked to ensure the large-scale success of the marine turtle conservation program. The turtle conservation activities were also supported by MCBT-SGP. The fellowship support of Yashwantrao Chavan Pratishthan proved crucial to carry out the project activities.

## **Appeal**

A mere glance at the threats faced by India's rich biodiversity convinces us of the urgency with which protection and conservation work needs to be undertaken in this field. SNM has endeavoured for the preservation of our natural wealth since the past two decades. We are also planning to build an iconic Nature Interpretation Centre at Chiplun. Here we plan to host exhibitions, lectures, nature's laboratory, awareness drives to bring everyone closer to the nature conservation. The cost of this project is about Rs. 15L. Come, participate in this movement to celebrate the Nature.

You may remit your contribution by way of Cheques/DD's or Credit directly to our following account and inform us immediately.

### **Foreign Donations Now Accepted**

Name of account: Sahyadri Nisarga Mitra, Chiplun

Name of Bank: Bank of India

Address: Centre I complex, Karad Road, Bahaddur Sheikh Naka, Chiplun

Account Number: 148010110000226

SWIFT Code: BKIDINBBBOS

FCRA Registration number: 083950039

### **Donations within India**

#### **Donations will be exempt from IT under 80G**

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Name of Bank: Bank of India, Chiplun

Account Number: 141110110000077

NEFT: BKID0001411

Name of Bank: Bank of Maharashtra, Chiplun

Account Number: 20061344941

NEFT: MAHB0000296

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