OLIVE RIDLEY: ENVIRONMENT

NEWS: A surge of dead sea turtles in the sand

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

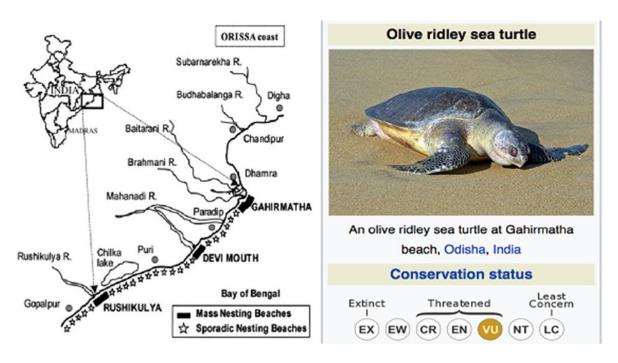
Since January 2025, **Tamil Nadu has witnessed an alarming increase in Olive Ridley turtle deaths, with over 1,200 dead turtles recorded—three times the usual count.** Key causes include bottom trawling, gill nets, plastic pollution, and habitat destruction, raising serious ecological and conservation concerns.

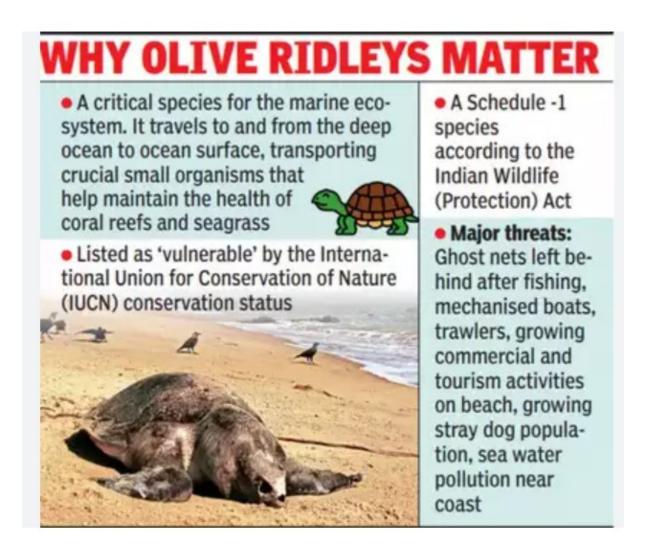
1. Cultural and Ecological Significance

- **Symbol of a Healthy Ecosystem:** Olive Ridley turtles play a crucial role in maintaining marine biodiversity by supporting seagrass growth, sustaining fish populations, and controlling jellyfish numbers.
- Cultural Importance: Fishermen in Tamil Nadu refer to these turtles as "guests" and "god," emphasizing their traditional significance in coastal communities.

2. Protection Status of Olive Ridley Turtles

- Wildlife Protection Act, 1972: Schedule I (Highest protection under Indian law)
- IUCN Red List: Vulnerable (Declining population due to human activities)
- CITES: Appendix I (Banned from international trade)





3. Primary Causes of Turtle Deaths

A. Fishing-Related Threats

- 1. Bottom Trawling
 - Fishing boats **enter restricted zones**, leading to entanglement of turtles in nets.
 - Trawling disturbs the seabed, damaging seagrass beds essential for marine life.
- 2. Gill Nets
 - Widespread use of gill nets traps turtles **accidentally**, leading to drowning.
- 3. Lack of Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs)
 - TEDs are **not widely used**, as fishermen fear economic losses.

B. Environmental and Habitat Destruction

4. Plastic Pollution

- Turtles mistake plastic for food, leading to **digestive blockages and poisoning**.
- 5. Coastal Development
 - Hard structures like groynes and seawalls disturb nesting sites.
 - Light pollution confuses hatchlings, preventing them from reaching the sea.

4. Impacts on the Turtle Population

• Female turtles found dead with eggs, reducing reproductive success.

- Decline in nesting:
 - 2025: Only 2 nests recorded (compared to 30 in previous years).
- **Disrupted migratory patterns** due to changing monsoon conditions.

5. Government and Conservation Efforts

A. State and Central Initiatives

• Tamil Nadu Task Force:

- Strengthening fishing regulations.
- Enforcing TED usage to reduce bycatch.
- Monitoring boat engine horsepower.
- Tamil Nadu Forest Department:
 - Joint patrols with authorities to prevent **trawler violations**.

B. Challenges in Implementation

- Fishermen resist TEDs, fearing reduced fish catch and financial losses.
- Need for **collaborative solutions** that balance conservation with local livelihoods.

6. Wider Regional Impact

- Andhra Pradesh also reported 2,032 turtle deaths by January 26.
- Unusually rough monsoon season and oceanic conditions exacerbating the crisis.

7. Collaboration for Conservation

- A. Strengthening Fishermen Participation
 - Community awareness programs on turtle-friendly fishing practices.
 - Compensation schemes for losses due to TED implementation.

B. Use of Technology

- Mobile apps to track turtle activity and report entanglements.
- Drones and satellite tracking to monitor nesting sites.

8. Call to Action

The surge in turtle deaths highlights the urgent need for:

- Stronger enforcement of fishing laws
- Sustainable fishing practices.
- Eco-friendly coastal development policies.
- Community-driven conservation programs.

Source: <u>https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/along-tamil-nadu-coast-a-surge-of-dead-sea-turtles/article69193057.ece</u>