

# 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)



# WHY OLIVE RIDLEYS MATTER

- A critical species for the marine ecosystem. It travels to and from the deep ocean to ocean surface, transporting crucial small organisms that help maintain the health of coral reefs and seagrass



- Listed as 'vulnerable' by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) conservation status



- A Schedule -1 species according to the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act

- **Major threats:** Ghost nets left behind after fishing, mechanised boats, trawlers, growing commercial and tourism activities on beach, growing stray dog population, sea water pollution near coast

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