

ENTANGLED HAWKSBILL TURTLE SAVED BY FISHERFOLK OF MULOOR, KARNATAKA

BINDU SULOCHANAN^{1#}, VEENA. S¹, PRATHIBHA ROHIT¹ AND V. KRIPA²

¹Mangalore Research Centre of Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute, Karnataka, India

²Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute, Kochi, India

[#]binduchaithanya@yahoo.co.in

On October 3rd 2015 the fisherfolk of Muloor, Udipi District of Karnataka, India, found a hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) entangled in a ghost gillnet and struggling to swim at a depth of 6m around 3km from the shore of Kaup Beach (13.22361°N, 74.73722°E). As they were aware that turtles need to be protected, they brought the turtle to the shore, cut the entangled net and released it back to the sea. The curved carapace length was measured at 65cm and the weight estimated at ~48kg. The hawksbill is a critically endangered sea turtle as per global IUCN listing. In India, hawksbill turtles nest in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and to a lesser extent in Lakshadweep (Andrews *et al.*, 2006). There are no confirmed reports of hawksbill turtles nesting along the Karnataka coast, but fisherfolk have previously reported sighting hawksbill turtles offshore of Udipi and Uttara Kannada districts in Karnataka (Ravi & Rakesh, 2013) and hawksbill turtle carapaces have been found in fishers' houses in Karnataka (Sharath, 2006).

Infrequent, and not recent, hawksbill turtle nesting has been observed in Maharashtra (Katdare, 2013) but not in Kerala (Dileepkumar & Jaykumar 2002, 2006), states to the north and south of Karnataka respectively. Therefore, this turtle could have been a small breeding female migrating to its nesting beach. Alternatively, it may inhabit the local area; hawksbill turtles have been observed by fishers in Karnataka (Pandit & Soans, 2013). Hawksbill turtles inhabit a wide range of habitats during their adult life, including coastal waters (Baillie & Groombridge, 1996), lagoons, coral reefs, estuaries, and mangrove swamps (Gaos *et al.*, 2012). Off Kaup Beach, there are small, rocky shallow islands and mangroves that the turtle could have inhabited until it was tangled in the ghost gillnet. On 20th January 2015, the fishermen of Muloor released three olive ridley turtles similarly trapped in a gillnet.

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