Heavy landing of small sized Indian mackerel by ring seine units

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Pazhaverkadu in Thiruvallur district of Tamil Nadu is unique in that ring seine operations are rampant here while in the adjacent Chennai area, these are not operated, mainly as a result of consensus among the fishermen against its use. On 2.5.2017, heavy landing of Indian mackerel by the ring seines operated at Pazhaverkadu as per operational details gathered from the fishermen. Each mother boat unit of 12 m overall length (OAL) had 5 to 6 carrier boats with a capacity of 1500 kg each. An estimated 60 t of mackerel whose size varied from 170 to 185 was landed by around 80 units. All were in immature stage with gut containing zooplankton. Because of their small sizes, the price per kilogram of mackerel was around ₹30 only and this too only because it was the annual fishing ban period when catches are generally low. The entire catch was transported to Kerala. Enquiries revealed the landing of mackerel by ring seines had started from 26.4.2017 and continued up to 4.5.2017.

Speargun fishing off Kovalam coast

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As an adventure underwater sport, speargun fishing is practiced at Kovalam coast near Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. Spearguns are designed to launch a spear at fish or other underwater animals based on a trigger mechanism. The spear has a flopper or barb that is attached to the muzzle of the gun by a monofilament line and basically the two types of guns used are pneumatic and rubber band powered spear guns. Off Kovalam coast, mainly imported ones obtained from the visiting foreign tourists are popular (Fig. 1).

Fishermen as well as expert skin divers whenever free from other fishing and livelihood activities, are involved in spear gun fishing designed for sport tourists, which occurs throughout the year but peaks during October - March period. A fisherman or an expert diver who can do dives of about 12-15 m from the surface proceeds to the ground located around 2 km from the coast along with the tourists. A fibre boat with an overall length of 9 m fitted with an outboard engine of 40 hp with a fish hold on the deck to hold the catch in fresh condition is employed. The duration of the trip varies from 3-5 hours and can bring in about 12-30 kg of high valued table fishes. Assorted reef fish, such as groupers, red snappers, jacks, barracudas, mackerels, cobia, leather skin, sweet lips, spade fish, surgeon fish
and big trevally in extremely fresh condition, fetches high price from the nearby star hotels at Kovalam which in turn provides further income to the fishers. Harpooning or spear fishing is restricted mainly to sport fishing in most of the countries. Often, the fishermen selectively target the biggest fish they can find, which often will be the brooders whose excessive removal can affect the reproductive potential of that particular stock. Also with prevalent low concern about diving safety, several divers carrying a loaded spear gun in a restricted area during the peak seasons can be potentially dangerous. This adventurous fishing activity, needs to be focused and developed as a sport with proper guidelines for safety of the sports fishermen as well as the fishermen community who guide and conduct these programmes.

Fig. 1. A spear gun operated along Kovalam coast

Nesting of Olive Ridley turtles at Chavakkad Beach

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There are several reports on the nesting of Olive ridley turtles, *Lepidochelys olivacea* from the east coast of India and the Andaman Islands but similar reports for the west coast of India are scanty. Every year Olive ridley turtles nest during November to March with important sites being Panchavadi, Edakkazhiyur and Akalad beaches along Chavakkad coast in Kerala. The turtles come to the shore during night time to lay their eggs in pits created by scraping out sand with its hind flippers and after covering the same wit sand again, returns to the sea. It was found that jackals and stray dogs were digging the nests and devouring the eggs disrupting the recruitment of these turtles. Hence, volunteers of Green Habitat, an NGO committed to conservation, built a hatchery which was also used for education and public awareness programmes on turtle conservation. The collected eggs were transferred to this hatchery. During the breeding season of 2017-18, ten nests were saved from these three