

Olive ridley turtles released back into the sea at Visakhapatnam, Andhrapradesh - A note

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Five species of marine turtles viz., olive ridley turtle (*Lepidochelys olivacea*), loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*), leather back turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*), hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) and green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) are known to inhabit the Indian coastal waters. The most common species in Indian waters is olive ridley, which is also believed to be the most abundant marine turtle in the world. The coastline of Andhra Pradesh is one of the sporadic nesting habitats of olive ridley turtles which is popularly known as “Samudram Tabelu” in Telugu. The species is known to nest on the northern Andhra Pradesh coast which encompasses three districts namely Srikakulam, Vizianagaram and Visakhapatnam. This coast may also serve as an intermediate developmental habitat for sub-adult ridley turtles and for juvenile and sub-adult green turtles *Chelonia mydas*.

The present note is an account of an accidental capture of two olive ridley turtles as bycatch in trawl net at a depth of 40 m while carrying out experimental trawling onboard a commercial single day trawler along Visakhapatnam coast on 27th November 2012 (Fig.1 & 2).The turtles looked inactive with little movement of flipper. This may be due to the prolonged struggle inside cod end to extricate themselves from the trawl net. After taking morphometric measurement the turtles were released back into the sea. Initially the turtles exhibited slow movements. Thereafter the turtles freely swam deep into the sea. Accidental entanglement is a matter of concern since olive ridley turtle are endangered and are protected as per various international agreements. Olive ridley turtles are categorized as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List (IUCN, 2010) and are included in Schedule-I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. They are listed in Annexure II of the SPAW (a Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife), Appendix-I of CITES



Fig. 1. Olive ridley turtle (*L. olivacea*) as bycatch in trawl net (Dorsal view)

(Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna) and Appendices I and II of the Convention on Migratory Species (the Bonn Convention). So it's high time to educate and create awareness among fishermen to release back the turtles which are accidentally caught.

The curve carapace length and weight of both the turtle were 68 cm and 40- 45 kg (approximate) respectively. Detailed morphometric measurements recorded are as follows

Table 1. Morphometric measurement of Olive ridley turtle

Characters	Measurements (cm)
Total length	97
Curved carapace length	68
Curved carapace width	65
Plastron length	52
Plastron width	50
Head length	28
No. of Pre-frontal scutes	2 pair
No. of Pre-central scutes	1
No. of Central (neural) scutes	5
No. of Lateral (coastal)scutes	7
No. of Marginal scutes	12
No. of Post-central scutes	1
No. of claws on flipper	1
Tail length	18
Inframarginal scutes with pores	4