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It's nesting season for Olive Ridley turtles across Maharashtra coastline; 407 nests recorded so far

Previously tagged Olive Ridleys return

Nayonika Bose
Mumbai, February 1

ON JANUARY 31 last year, a female Olive Ridley Turtle nesting on the shores of Guhagar beach in Ratnagiri district was flipper tagged with metal tags. The flipper tagging formed part of a pilot exercise carried out by the Mangrove Cell and Wildlife Institute of India (WII) in a bid to study nesting trends amongst the vulnerable species along the western coast of India.

A year on, earlier this month, a beach manager patrolling the Guhagar beach spotted glistening tags on a female turtle, bearing identification numbers — IND 11109 and IND 11110 — that revealed that the same turtle had returned back to nest to a familiar spot.

According to officials from the Maharashtra forest department, a total of four female turtles, of the 62 Olive Ridley turtles which had been flipper tagged in the pilot exercise last year between January and February along Konkan coast, have returned back to the same nesting site to lay eggs over the past month. “The return of the previously flipper tagged turtles at the same nesting site demonstrates a strong nesting site fidelity in the west coast. This is a significant finding which also highlights the success of the ongoing sea turtle conservation efforts along our coasts,” said Kanchan Pawar, Deputy Forest Officer, Mangrove South Konkan of the state forest department.

This discovery comes amid a thriving nesting season unfolding across Maharashtra’s vast coastline. In the past two months, over 407 nests have been built by Olive Ridley turtles to lay eggs across 57 beaches of Maharashtra’s coastal districts of Raigad, Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg. The ongoing nesting season is slated to con-

● Eggs laid & hatchlings in Maharashtra over the past decade

NESTING SEASON	NUMBER OF NESTS	NUMBER OF EGGS LAID	NUMBER OF HATCHLINGS	HATCHLING SUCCESS RATE
2014-15	75	8,456	4,681	55.35%
2015-16	118	12,669	7,048	55.63%
2016-17	125	13,139	7,736	58.87
2017-18	331	32,468	13,535	35.54%
2018-19	233	23,131	12,601	54.50%
2019-20	228	27,254	12,149	44.60%
2020-21	475	50,799	23,706	46.70%
2021-22	NA	70,271	34,593	NA
2022-23	1,447	1,57,647	84,521	53.61%
2023-24	2,597	2,50,327	1,68,702	67.39%
2024-25	2,929	2,74,842	1,71,245	62.31%
2025-26 (ongoing)	407 (ongoing)	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing

SOURCE: MANGROVE CELL, MAHARASHTRA FOREST DEPARTMENT

Smallest, most abundant sea turtle

● Smallest and most abundant of all sea turtle species (Some other sea turtle species in India include Green sea turtle, Hawksbill, Leatherback turtle, Loggerhead turtles)

● Size: 2-2.5 ft (60-70 cm)

● Weight: 35-50 kg

● **FOOD** They feed on shrimp, snails, crabs, jellyfish, other

varieties of fish and their eggs

● **THREATS** Fishing, exploitation of nesting beaches; illegal poaching for meat, eggs, shells, leather etc, natural predators



(Left) A flipper tagged Olive Ridley.



Deriving their name from the olive hue of their shells, Olive Ridley turtles are amongst the most abundant sea species, yet remain vulnerable and are protected under Schedule 1 of India’s Wildlife Protection Act of 1972.

The protected species are most renowned for their unique mass nesting strategy wherein

the shores en masse, where they look for safe nesting spots. After ascertaining a safe spot, the turtles burrow into the sandy surface to build a pot-like nest using their flippers. Into this nest, a turtle then lays anywhere between 80-150 eggs each over a span of two hours, then covers the nest hastily with her flippers, following which she

Over the course of the next 45-50 days, these eggs naturally hatch and the hatchlings wade into the seawaters where they spend their life. For every 1,000 hatchlings, experts estimate, only one Olive Ridley turtle survives to reach adulthood.

Unlike Odisha, which popularly records influx of lakhs of turtles, Maharashtra’s coasts wit-

turtles typically lay eggs solitarily. While the eastern coasts of Odisha and Tamil Nadu witness mass nesting, studies show that Maharashtra accounts for nearly 20 percent of the country’s Olive Ridley turtle nests.

In Maharashtra, this year’s nesting season kicked off in November 2025 when on November 17 the first Olive Ridley arrived at Guhagar beach and laid 128 eggs. The beach managers, local villagers who are roped in by the forest department to protect the species, then relocated the eggs into safe hatcheries away from the perils of human activity. After these protected eggs hatched, over 33 hatchlings (baby turtles) were released safely into the sea waters on January 14, 2026.

Since the first nesting in November, records procured from the South Konkan Mangrove Division show that a total of 407 nests have been recorded across the state’s beaches so far. Of these, five nests have been recorded in the beaches of Raigad district, 236 nests in Ratnagiri district beaches and 166 in Sindhudurg district.

“Of the total turtles which came to nest, we have noted that four Olive Ridley turtles were bearing flipper tags from last year’s exercise, indicating that they had returned to nest at the same site for another season. Such re-nesting and recapture records are scientifically important as well as for long-term conservation, as they enable researchers to estimate population size, remigration intervals, nesting frequency and habitat fidelity. In 2025, we had flipper tagged a total of nearly 62 female Olive Ridley turtles across the coastal districts,” said Pawar.

Typically, the nesting season in the state spans from November to March while the hatchling season continues until the end of May. In the previous nesting season of 2024-2025, a total of 2,929 were recorded across 57 beaches of the state. Over 2.74 lakh eggs were laid in these nests of which 1.71 lakh hatchlings were released into the sea, marking a survival