

Operation Olivia

Operation Olivia is a project carried out by the Indian Coast Guard to protect the population of Olive Ridley turtles during their nesting seasons from December to May.

It is carried out off the coast of Odisha, the primary habitat range of the turtles.

From November 2020 to May 2021, the Coast Guard devoted 225 ship days and 388 aircraft hours to protect 3.49 lakh turtles that laid eggs along the Odisha coast.”

This article will give further details about Operation Olivia within the context of the Civil Services Examination.

To know more about other topics that are part of the examinations, visit the UPSC Syllabus page.

Details of Operation Olivia

- Operation Olivia is carried out annually to protect Olive Ridley turtles during their breeding habitats and protect their habitat.
- It was launched in December 2020 in collaboration with the Odisha state forest department and the Indian Coast Guard. Two coast guard vessels and some aircraft have been allotted for this conservation venture.
- The coast guard vessels will ensure that no fishing vessels will enter the breeding sites like the Dhmara River and Rushikulya beach. Fishing near these sites has been banned by the Odisha state government.
- The Indian Coast Guard also carries out awareness programmes in order to involve the local community in the conservation of Olive Ridley Turtles.
- On November 1, 2020 Odisha Government prohibited sea fishing near the 20 km of Devi, Dhamara and Rushikalya Rivers. Anyone found to be fishing near these rivers are charged for violation of Orissa Marine Fishing Regulations Act, 1982 and Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

About Olive Ridley Turtles:

- Scientific Name - *Lepidochelys olivacea*
- Family - Cheloniidae
- Mass Nesting - Arribada

- Growing to about 61 cm (2 ft) in carapace length (measured along the curve), the Olive Ridley sea turtle gets its common name from its olive-colored carapace, which is heart-shaped and rounded.
- Hatchlings from these turtle species are of dark grey colour. Carapace length of the hatchlings range from 37 to 50 mm.
- Olive Ridley Turtles are found in relatively shallow marine waters around the world.

Need for Operation Olivia

Hatchlings of Olive Ridley Turtles are preyed on by feral dogs, pigs, ghost crabs and a host of other predator species found in their respective native habitats. When they grow to adulthood, these turtle species have very few predators. Bigger species such as sharks, whales and killer whales attack the turtles occasionally. On land, the Jaguar is the only known cat species strong enough to destroy the sea turtles shells.

Due to habitat loss, jaguar attacks are on the rise and fewer alternative food sources are available. Illegal poaching for eggs by humans and slaughter for turtle meat are also a threat to the turtle population.

Coastal development, natural disasters, climate change, and other sources of beach erosion have also been cited as potential threats to nesting grounds.

The Olive Ridley is classified as vulnerable according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature. These listings were largely responsible for halting the large-scale commercial exploitation and trade of Olive Ridley skins.

There are many projects initiated to sustain the population of the Olive Ridley sea turtle. An example of this is a program in Mexico where eggs laid by turtles coming ashore are moved to a hatchery. This protects the eggs from external threats like feral dogs, coyotes or erratic tides washing them away. Upon hatching, the turtles are carried to the beach and released.

A similar program was carried out in Chennai, where a wildlife team collected around 10,000 eggs out of which 8834 hatchlings were successfully released into the sea.