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News: Mass mortality of Olive Ridley turtles in A.P. raises concerns

- Hundreds of vulnerable Olive Ridley turtles have washed ashore along the coastline between Kakinada and Antarvedi in the Godavari region of Andhra Pradesh during the ongoing annual breeding season on the east coast. The breeding grounds—Sakhinetipalli, Malikipuram, Mamidikuduru and Allavaram—have been witnessing the mass mortality of the turtles over the past few weeks.
- The effluents being released from the aqua ponds along the coastline and the discharges from the pipelines of the onshore oil exploration facilities are blamed for the mass mortality of the turtles.

Olive Ridley Turtles

- Olive Riddley turtles are also known as **Pacific ridley sea turtle**.
- Olive ridley turtles are the **smallest and most abundant and are best known for their behavior of synchronized nesting in mass numbers, termed arribadas**.
- **Females return to the same beach from where they hatched**, to lay their eggs. They lay their eggs in conical nests about one and a half feet deep, which they laboriously dig with their hind flippers. In the Indian Ocean, the majority of olive ridleys nest in two or three large groups near Gahirmatha in Odisha. The

coast of Odisha in India is one the largest mass nesting site for the olive ridley, along with the coasts of Mexico and Costa Rica.

- The 480-km-long Odisha coast has three arribada beaches at Gahirmatha, the mouth of the Devi river, and in Rushikulya, where about 1 lakh nests are found annually.
- Olive Riddleys are distributed throughout tropical warm waters of Indian Ocean, Atlantic Ocean and Pacific Ocean.
- IUCN Status is Vulnerable whereas Schedule I of Wildlife Protection Act and Appendix I of CITES Convention protects the turtle.
- Major threats faced include heavy predation of eggs by dogs and wild animals, indiscriminate fishing with trawlers and gill nets, accidental collision with boats, slaughtering of nesting females by human and loss of arribadas due to beach soil erosion.
- Operation Kachhapa was launched to conserve Olive Ridley Turtles. It was launched by Odisha state forest department in collaboration with Wildlife Society of Odisha and other local NGOs.
- Operation Olivia has been conducted annually since 1980s by Indian Coast Guard to protect the Olive Riddley breeding from November to December.
- Odisha has half of the world's Olive Ridley turtle population and 90% of India's turtle population.

- There are five species of turtles in Indian waters — **Leatherback** (Vulnerable), **Loggerhead** (Endangered), **Hawksbill** (Critically Endangered), **Green** (Endangered) and **Olive Ridley**. All these turtles are protected under Schedules of Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- With an objective to conserve the Olive Ridley Turtles, the **UNDP Sea Turtle Project** was initiated by Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun as the **Implementing Agency in November 1999**.
- The following species of marine are being covered under this project - **green, hawksbill, loggerhead, leatherback, and olive ridley**.
- One of the main aims of the GOI – UNDP national sea turtle project was to **evaluate the status of and threats to marine turtles along the entire coastline** of India.
- The project is for **10 coastal states in India especially Odisha** where it has contributed towards the preparation of a map of breeding sites of Sea Turtles; identification of breeding places and habitats along the coastline, and migratory routes taken by Sea Turtles.
- The project also helped in the **development of guidelines to safeguard the turtle mortality rate and for tourism in sea turtle areas**. Amongst the major achievements of the project is the **demonstration of the use of Satellite Telemetry to locate the migratory route of sea turtles in the sea**.