General Studies – 3; *Topic: Conservation*

Protecting Olive Ridley Sea Turtles

1) Introduction

- The olive ridley sea turtle, also known as the Pacific ridley sea turtle, is found in warm and tropical waters, primarily in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.
- They can also be found in warm waters of Atlantic Ocean.
- Although still abundant compared to other sea turtle species olive ridleys are susceptible to anthropogenic threats.

2) Main Threats

- Habitat loss and degradation
- Wildlife trade
- Collection of eggs and meat for consumption
- Incidental capture (by catch)
- Climate change
- Marine pollution (including oil spills) and debris.
- Beach erosion and weather

3) Reasons for Decline in population

- The endangered species was found dead in large numbers after getting trapped in illegal fishing boats and nets
- Several environmental factors, including chemical factors like salinity of the beach and the sea near the coast
- There is a corrosive effect of salinity on egg shells
- The ports being planned along Odisha's coast line could endanger turtle nesting.
- Suspicion of the fishing community involved in the illegal trade of turtles
- Threat from cyclones. "Phailin in 2013 and Hud-hud in 2014 significantly contributed to a loss in the breeding grounds.
- Trawlers come from Thailand and Myanmar and use smaller boats to smuggle turtles

4) Breeding Grounds

- The olive ridley sea turtle nests at several sites in the western Indian Ocean, Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia.
- The single most important breeding area for olive ridleys in the Indian Ocean along the Bay of Bengal is Orissa.
- The mouth of Rushikulya River is the location of one of the largest mass nesting sites of olive ridley sea turtles in India.
- A record-breaking mass nesting by 3.8 lakh endangered olive ridley turtles took place at the Rushikulya rookery coast in Ganjam district of Odisha

5) Conservation status

- The olive ridley is classified as Vulnerable according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN)
- It is listed in Appendix I of CITES.

- These listings were largely responsible for halting the large scale commercial exploitation and trade of olive ridley skins.
- The Convention on Migratory Species and the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles have also provided olive ridleys with protection
- Preserving the olive ridley sea turtle population is carried out in Chennai and Odisha coast

6) Protecting the Turtles

- Olive ridley turtles feed on invertebrates and may play important roles in both open ocean and coastal ecosystems.
- Local communities should be trained in order to continue a long-term conservation program.
- Educating villagers in coastal regions adjacent to Rushikulya rookery and in schools
- Establishing observation camps near the coasts and protection of the turtles and their eggs during the mass nesting
- Security personnel in speedboats must ensure that the coast is guarded to prevent the entry of illegal trawlers.
- Check on smuggling rings involved in selling the turtles in the international market.
- Reducing by catch and promoting smart fishing.

7) Role of local community

- Worldwide, the most successful conservation efforts have been made by local communities.
- Green Light Rural Association (GLRA), a non-profit based in Astaranga in Odisha managed to stall a state government move to acquire land for ports in the fragile nesting area.
- GLRA started a project called “Turtle Friends” to identify strategic sites and fishing communities along the coastline.
- Communities were involved in beach clean-up programs
- Participation by locals not only provides useful hands-on assistance; it gives people a stake in the fate of the animals they spent time trying to help.