



Sighting of a dead Indian Flapshell Turtle in Chennai beach, India



Indian Flapshell Turtle *Lissemys punctata* carcass sighted on beach in Chennai coast.
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The Indian Flapshell Turtle (IFT) *Lissemys punctata* (Bonnaterre, 1789) is a common freshwater turtle inhabiting most of India, found in the inland waterbodies. This small-sized species has an average carapace length of 250 mm, with larger individuals reaching up to 350 mm (Bhupathy 1989). While its presence is known from Chennai (Kalaivasan & Kanakasabai 1999), it has been recorded from freshwater bodies only. In this note, we report on a strange sighting of a carcass of this species

on the beach, off the sea coast of Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. On 23 December 2024 while on a field visit to the Pattinapakkam beach (13.022211° N, 80.278661° E) at the southern end of the beach, just north of Adyar River, an IFT carcass was seen on the beach sand next to the manual boats plied by the fishing community.

The carcass measured 23 × 16 cm (l × b), was trampled and decomposed, missing three limbs;



head and tail partly damaged; plastron and carapace with scutes peeling off from shell. Seven callosities on plastron and five ventral scutes on carapace positively identified it as IFT (Das 1987). In the carcass, five ventral scutes did not extend along entire length of carapace midline (vs. ventral scutes running the entire length in Loggerhead Sea Turtle *Caretta caretta*, Green Sea Turtle *Chelonia mydas*), outer rim of marginal scale edges even and smooth-sided (vs. overlapping, serrated edges in Hawksbill Sea Turtle *Eretmochelys imbricata*), ovoid to oblong, fairly convex carapace (vs. a more domed, heart-shaped carapace in Olive Ridley Sea Turtle *Lepidochelys olivacea*, five distinct ridges along the length of the carapace in Leatherback Sea Turtle *Dermochelys coriacea*) (Das 1987).

The sighting of a IFT carcass here in Pattinapakkam beach throws open a few possible reasons. They are: (i) carcass drifted from the nearby Adyar River, a brackish water body, (ii) the turtle could have been caught in fishing nets in Adyar River and was noticed and discarded here on the beach, (iii) the turtle would have strayed into someone's house further inland and the self-indulgent householders caught it and released it in the beach water mistaking it to be a sea turtle, and (iv) a potential offender of illegal wildlife trade would have secretly dumped off the turtle here either alive or dead, fearing apprehension from authorities.

For the natural drifting of either a live or dead turtle to take place from the nearby Adyar River, swelling of the river water owing to floods must have happened. However, that was not the case during the days of our observation or in the preceding week. Likewise, it may not be a forcefully discarded smuggled turtle, as

the area where it was seen is a busy and well-frequented spot, where fish landing sites, markets, fishing hamlets and picnic spots are all situated next to one another, with human movement even at night. So, the one remaining option of self-indulgent people releasing stray freshwater turtle wrongly inside beach water appears as the most likely proposition.

We advocate the general public to contact the government-authorised help line numbers, led by the forest department and its ancillary forces to properly tackle such situations of wildlife straying into private compounds. Being a well-informed "first responders" is their primary function. In this case, several organisations dedicated to wildlife awareness and education are situated not far from the site of incident. It is hoped that people use such facilities to enlighten themselves of the dos and don'ts and act accordingly, in the interest of wildlife and environmental well-being.

References

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