Devi river’s loss is Rushikulya’s gain
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While Olive Ridleys give one site a miss, they land up at the other for two spells of nesting

The late recurrence of mass nesting of Olive Ridley turtles at the Rushikulya rookery coast in Odisha may be due to inter-rookery migration of these endangered marine reptiles.

While the turtles appeared for two spells of mass nesting at the Rushikulya rookery coast this year, they gave the Devi river mouth, another nesting site to the north of Rushikulya, a miss.

Divisional forest officer (DFO) Ashis Behera said the turtles may have found the Devi river mouth unsuitable for nesting. He added that the turtles that had reached the river mouth for mating and nesting may have preferred to migrate to the Rushikulya rookery coast to lay eggs.

Suitable location

According to reptile experts, female Olive Ridleys have the capacity to store fertilised eggs inside their body for a long period ranging up to two years. They do not lay eggs if they do not find suitable location for the purpose.

“It can be suspected that the female Olive Ridleys that had come to mate and nest near the Devi river mouth stored their fertilised eggs within their body and searched for conducive beach for their nesting, which they found near the Rushikulya rookery,” said the DFO. This could be the reason behind the late recurrence of mass nesting at this place, he added.

In February this year, the Rushikulya rookery witnessed the highest-ever number of turtles nesting — 4,45,091. Even as the mass hatching of eggs was on, the Olive Ridleys appeared again for nesting.

According to forest officials, around 36,000 mother turtles had laid eggs till Sunday morning during the second phase of mass nesting that started on the morning of April 14.

This year, natural forces had made the Rushikulya rookery coast more conducive for mass nesting. A sandbar near Podampeta village was completely eroded and its sand got deposited on the coast. Due to this, a stretch of the beach widened up and its height increased, too. This saved the Olive Ridley nests from the vagaries of erosion caused by tidal waves.

Added to it, strict restrictions enforced by the forest department drastically reduced human and predator intervention. This may have attracted the mother turtles from the Devi river mouth region to nest here.

However, nothing can be said for sure as there is no mechanism available to track the turtles. This leaves it open for serious scientific study on the life and migration of Olive Ridleys by wildlife experts.