

In this Indian city, locals patrol the beaches at night to protect endangered sea turtles



2 of 25 | A forest official searches for olive ridley sea turtle eggs on Marina Beach in Chennai, India, Thursday, March 13, 2025. (AP Photo/Mahesh Kumar A.)

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CHENNAI, India (AP) — For nearly four decades, residents in southern India's coastal city of Chennai have patrolled moonlit beaches at night trying to protect sea turtles and their hatchlings that for millennia have nested along these shores.



5 of 25 | A forest official collects olive ridley sea turtle eggs on Marina Beach in Chennai, India, Friday, March 14, 2025. (AP Photo/Mahesh Kumar A.)



8 of 25 | Forest officials and volunteers look at a carcass of an endangered olive ridley turtle on Marina Beach in Chennai, India, Friday, March 14, 2025. (AP Photo/Mahesh Kumar A.)



11 of 25 | A crow flies over a hatchery for the olive ridley sea turtles on Elliot's Beach in Chennai, India, Sunday, March 16, 2025. (AP Photo/Mahesh Kumar A.)



14 of 25 | Markers are placed where the olive ridley sea turtle eggs are buried in sand for hatching on Elliot's Beach in Chennai, India, Sunday, March 16, 2025. (AP Photo/Mahesh Kumar A.)



15 of 25 | A young olive ridley turtle crawls out at a hatching center on Elliot's Beach in Chennai, India, Monday, March 31, 2025. (AP Photo/Mahesh Kumar A.)



18 of 25 | Forest officials show olive ridley turtle hatchlings to visitors before releasing them into the sea at Elliot's Beach in Chennai, India, Saturday, March 29, 2025. (AP Photo/Mahesh Kumar A.)

Hungry dogs, locals looking for a snack, and disorienting lights are among the hazards facing the olive ridley turtles and their eggs, which can take up to 60 days to hatch. Many turtles are caught offshore in fishing nets, which this year alone have killed hundreds of them in the area.

Nonetheless, local residents have collected and helped to protect more than 260,000 turtle eggs this year in Tamil Nadu state, whose capital is Chennai.

Patrollers scan the beaches looking for turtles nesting or small sand mounds that might indicate eggs are buried underneath. When they find a cache of eggs, they transport them to a protected area and rebury them at the same depth as they were initially found. This is crucial since temperatures affect what sex the turtles will be. Researchers say rising temperatures from human-caused planet warming are resulting in fewer male turtles being born.

“We cover a lot of ground, at least 30 kilometers (18 miles), by breaking into smaller groups and each group walking seven or eight kilometers,” said a volunteer named Melvin, who goes only by his first name and has been working with turtle conservation groups for several years.