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Operation Olivia for Olive Ridley Turtles

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Why in News

Recently, the Indian Coast Guard has pressed into service an aircraft for 'Operation Olivia' to protect Olive Ridley turtles.

Indian Coast Guard

- It is an **Armed Force, Search and Rescue and Maritime Law Enforcement agency** under the Ministry of Defence. It was established in 1978.
- It has a **wide range of task capabilities for both surface and air operations**. It is one of the **largest coast guards in the world**.

Key Points

- **Operation Olivia:**
 - Every year, the Indian Coast Guard's "Operation Olivia", **initiated in the early 1980s**, helps **protect Olive Ridley turtles as they congregate along the Odisha coast** for breeding and nesting from November to December.
It also **intercepts unlawful trawling activities**.
 - Round-the-clock surveillance is conducted from **November till May** utilising Coast Guard assets such as **fast patrol vessels**, air cushion vessels, interceptor craft and Dornier aircraft to enforce laws near the rookeries (colony of breeding animals).
From November **2020 to May 2021**, the **Coast Guard devoted 225 ship days and 388 aircraft hours to protect 3.49 lakh turtles** that laid eggs along the Odisha coast.

- **Olive Ridley Turtles:**

- **Features:**

- The Olive ridley turtles are the **smallest and most abundant of all sea turtles found in the world.**



- These turtles are **carnivores** and get their name from their olive colored carapace.
 - They **migrate thousands of kilometers** between feeding and mating grounds in the course of a year.
 - They are best known for their unique **mass nesting called Arribada**, where thousands of females come together on the same beach to lay eggs.

- **Habitat:**

- They are **found in warm waters** of the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian oceans.
 - The Odisha's **Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary** is known as the world's largest rookery of sea turtles.

- **Threats:**

- They are **extensively poached for their meat, shell and leather**, and their eggs.
 - However, the most severe threat they face is the **accidental killing through entanglement in trawl nets and gill nets** due to uncontrolled fishing during their mating season around nesting beaches.
 - An ever-increasing **debris of plastics, fishing nets, discarded nets, polythene and other garbage** dumped by tourists and fishing workers.

- **Other Initiatives:**

To reduce accidental killing in India, the Odisha government has made it mandatory for trawls to use **Turtle Excluder Devices (TEDs)**, a net specially designed with an exit cover which allows the turtles to escape while retaining the catch.

Source: TH