

Project Update: October 2012

1. Population Assessment

Surveys at five protected areas in the Agasthyamalai Hills of Kerala have been completed. Thirty randomly selected, 2ha grids were surveyed at each area and, household surveys were undertaken in parallel. Travancore tortoise (*Indotestudo travancorica*) was detected at four areas while the Cochin forest cane turtle (*Vijayachelys silvatica*) was found only at one. A total of 42 Travancore tortoise individuals were found, a large portion of them in indigenous settlements while a single Cochin forest cane turtle was detected. Five Indian black turtles (*Melanochelys trijuga*) were also found.

2. Interviews

A total of 81 questionnaires were completed with indigenous communities and local forest department officials at the five protected areas in Kerala. Two separate questionnaires were used for the two stakeholders. Along with the focal species of this study, five other chelonian species were included in the interviews to understand the status and threats to all the freshwater and terrestrial chelonians of south Kerala. While Travancore tortoise, Cochin forest cane turtle, Indian black turtle and Indian flapshell turtle (*Lissemys punctata*) were the most common species encountered, Travancore tortoise and Indian black turtle were the most consumed. The major threats faced by the two focal species of this study, the Travancore tortoise and the Cochin forest cane turtle were fire, human consumption, consumption by wild animals and elephant stamping.

Human consumption, other than for the meat per se was undertaken to cure diseases, mostly piles. Social taboos existed specifically for the Cochin forest cane turtle at a few indigenous settlements.

3. Remaining surveys

- Field and questionnaire surveys in Theni and Kodaikanal Forest Divisions are currently being undertaken.
- Researcher and public surveys are being designed.

4. Publications

- A note on a new record of Cochin forest cane turtle has been accepted for publication.
- A research paper based on data from the field surveys is currently under review.
- The research paper based on the questionnaire data is under preparation.

