

## **Project Update: March 2005**

11th March 2005

I have completed three productive months of field work in the Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park. The study has so far yielded a few interesting discoveries, among them being the discovery of eight species all of which are new records for the area and the discovery of *Cerberus rynchops* (a predominantly estuarine species) a significant distance from the mainland, in the sea surrounding one of the islands surveyed. Work got held up for a brief period after the Tsunami, as fishing in the area came to an abrupt halt. It was however, a small price to pay and we were actually rather fortunate to have survived it as my study area was completely sheltered by Sri Lanka. I initially started off by accompanying trawlers on a few fishing voyages. Since these trips did not yield much data in terms of sea snakes, I altered my sampling strategy from accompanying trawlers to contacting trawler owners at each of the major fish landing sites (trawlers from each base operate in different fishing grounds) along the coast and instructing them to bring back sea snakes.

I regularly visit these sites, collecting sea snakes from designated trawlers which are then recorded for morphometric data. Dead snakes are also dissected to obtain data on their feeding and breeding biology. I also undertake regular surveys on the islands in the marine national park for species that may be unique to these areas, as they support mangroves and coral reefs. With the help of a local assistant and photographs, I hold informal discussions with various groups of the local fishing community. These help me to get an idea of the present state of awareness on sea snakes, which would form the crux for questionnaire surveys that I will be starting with soon.