

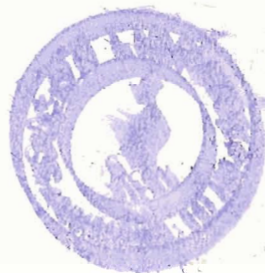


STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE  
RIVER TERRAPIN *BATAGUR BASKA*  
IN THE SUNDERBAN OF INDIA

PR-9D



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Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology & Natural History

# **STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE RIVER TERRAPIN *BATAGUR BASKA* IN THE SUNDERBAN OF INDIA**

*Final Report of the Project*

*Funded by the IUCN/SSC Turtle Recovery Programme  
of the American Museum of Natural History*

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**SACON - Technical Report 3**

**Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology & Natural History  
Coimbatore, India**

**1995**

# ABSTRACT

A status survey of the River Terrapin *Batagur baska* was conducted in the Sunderban of West Bengal, India from February to May 1994. Intensive searches were carried out to determine the present status of *Batagur* in the wild. Village ponds and captive breeding centres were visited to assess the number in captivity. Markets were surveyed and queries made with local people to determine the exploitation level. *Batagur* was found to be extremely rare and about 10 nesting females survive in the Indian Sunderban. Within Sunderban Tiger Reserve (STR), they nest only in *Bagmara* block (*Mechua* island) and outside, the *Kalas* forests of *Chulkati* block, 24 Pargana Forest Division appears to be suitable for *Batagur* nesting. *Batagur* was not recorded in any of the markets surveyed and it appears that currently this species is not being commercially exploited. Approximately 20-25 captive raised *Batagur* were available with Captive Breeding Centres, *Batagur* Rearing Centres of STR and Alipur Zoological Park, Calcutta and about 15-20 adult turtles were in village ponds adjacent to STR. About 40 individuals of the captive raised *Batagur* have reportedly been released during January-April 1994 in the river Harinbanga of STR by the Forest Department.

Regular surveys are recommended in *Bagmara* block especially in *Mechua* island during the breeding season to estimate the size of the breeding population of *Batagur*. Pig proof fencing is suggested in *Mechua* island to prevent nest predation and to ensure survival of the nest and hatchlings. Satellite radio-tracking is necessary to study the habitat preference and movement patterns of *Batagur* for identifying corridors connecting feeding and breeding habitats. This is essential for improved protection. A captive breeding unit is suggested using existing captive *Batagur* in village ponds for restocking in wild.

**Key words:** River terrapin, *Batagur baska*, Sunderban, exploitation, conservation.