

New species of horseshoe crab discovered along Odisha coast

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Sumedha Chinnari holding a pair of the new species of horseshoe crab | Express

KENDRAPARA: A new horseshoe crab species has been found along the Odisha coast. Marine biologist of National Institute of Oceanography (NIO), Goa Sumedha Chinnari recently discovered the new species from a creek near Bay of Bengal in the State.

“We found a rare and new horseshoe crab species along Odisha coast three months back during our research on the marine species. Since more research is underway, we have not disclosed the location from where the new species has been found,” said Chinnari over telephone from Goa.

The NIO biologist further informed that two types of horseshoe crabs - *T. gigas* and *C. rotundicauda* - existed in India before the discovery of the new species. The common natural habitat for *C. rotundicauda* is muddy and brackish areas. Similarly, *T. gigas* can be found in sandy to muddy areas, she said.

The spawning activity of horseshoe crabs was influenced by several environmental factors such as salinity and temperature. Senior scientists of NIO are examining the molecular biology and taxonomy of the new species, said Chinnari.

The Ministry of Environment and Forest in 2009 declared the horseshoe crab as an endangered species and included it in the IV Schedule of Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. Now, catching and killing horseshoe crab is an offence.

The biologist said scientists of National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) are doing research to detect primitive life on faraway planets, including Mars, by using the blood of horseshoe crab. The crabs are on the verge of extinction in countries like Japan, Indonesia and the US. But in India, particularly along Odisha coast, it has a sizeable population, she said and added that due to beach armouring, construction of sea walls and stone packing of beaches in the State, the population of horseshoe crab is dwindling rapidly as the marine species is not getting enough space for laying eggs and mating.

In 1997, the Government declared Kendrapara's Gahiramatha beach, known as the world's largest rookery of Olive Ridleys, as a turtle sanctuary to protect the sea turtles. It is high time the Government declared the abode of horseshoe crabs as a sanctuary to protect the species, Chinnari added.