

NOTES



REDISCOVERY OF THE LEATHERBACK SEA TURTLE AT KADMAT ISLAND, LAKSHADWEEP ARCHIPELAGO, INDIA

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The Lakshadweep Archipelago is a chain of low-lying atolls in the northern Indian Ocean, comprising 12 coral atolls enclosing 27 small islands. This geographical positioning makes it a potentially important habitat and migratory corridor for sea turtles (Tripathy *et al.*, 2002). The first documented sea turtle survey in this region was conducted in 1976 (Bhaskar, 1978, 1979). Subsequent investigations by the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) (Silas, 1984; Lal Mohan, 1989) and later by Tripathy *et al.* (2006) reported four out of the seven globally recorded sea turtle species in the region. Among these, three species — the green (*Chelonia mydas*), olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*), and hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) turtles — are the most common and are known to forage or nest in the islands. In contrast, there is limited and inconclusive evidence regarding the occurrence of the leatherback sea turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) in Lakshadweep, and not much known about its nesting in the region.

The leatherback sea turtle is the largest extant marine turtle and is easily distinguishable by its large body size and leathery carapace. It is widely distributed across tropical and temperate oceans and exhibits extensive migratory behaviour. In India, its major nesting populations are primarily confined to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, particularly Great and Little Nicobar Islands and Little Andaman Island (Andrews & Shankar, 2002; Andrews *et al.*, 2006). Recent systematic marine biodiversity assessments and turtle monitoring programmes in the Lakshadweep Archipelago (Shankar *et al.*, 2024) have not documented the presence of leatherback turtles, rendering it effectively absent from contemporary regional records. However, historical accounts and indigenous ecological knowledge indicate that the species, locally known as “lasar mulla,” was occasionally encountered by fishers and only rarely came ashore for nesting (Bhaskar, 1978). Earlier systematic surveys by Tripathy *et al.* (2002, 2006),

based on secondary data, reported that only a small proportion of fishers mentioned sightings or nesting events, but these accounts lacked verifiable scientific evidence. In this context, the present sighting of a leatherback sea turtle from the coastal waters of Kadmat Island represents a rare and scientifically significant record for the Lakshadweep Archipelago.

Kadmat island is 8km long and 550m wide, with a lagoon covering a total area of 20.9km². On 29th April 2026, at 13:30 h, crew members of the fishing craft *Amina Beebi* (IND-LD-KD-MO-452) sighted a single leatherback sea turtle ~0.44nm offshore on the southeastern (11.177° N, 72.768° E) side of the island (Figure 1). The individual was observed in a surface-basking state and had an estimated carapace length of ~1.5m (Figure 2).

The present sighting at Kadmat Island therefore represents a notable rediscovery. This occurrence may indicate previously undocumented migratory routes through the Arabian Sea, linked to oceanographic conditions such as prey (jellyfish) abundance, or broader ecological changes influencing species distribution. Given the species’ global conservation status as Vulnerable (Wallace *et al.*, 2013), such records carry significant implications for regional marine biodiversity assessments and conservation planning. This finding underscores the importance of integrating traditional ecological knowledge with modern scientific monitoring. This observation constitutes the first contemporary evidence of the species in Lakshadweep waters. It also highlights the need for systematic, long-term observation efforts in Lakshadweep to better understand the occurrence patterns of rare and migratory marine megafauna.

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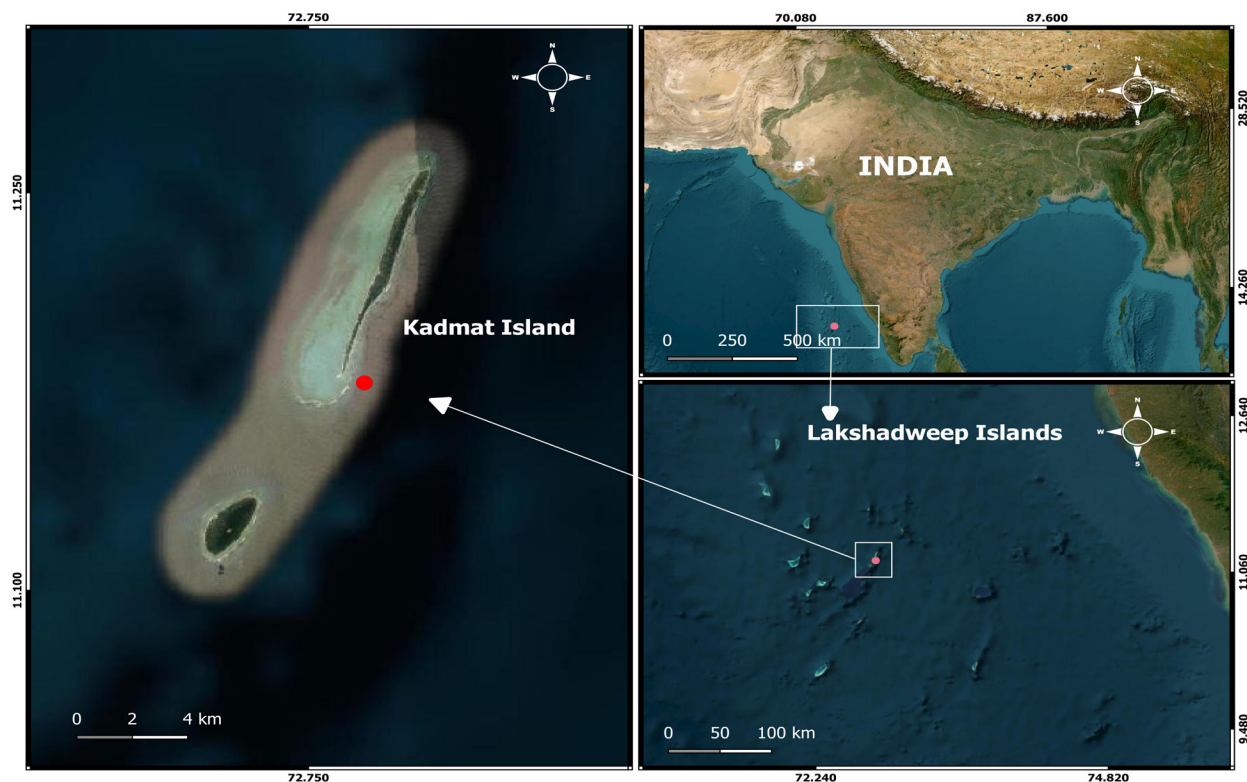


Figure 1. Map of Kadmat Island. The Red Circle Indicates the Location of the Leatherback Turtle Sighting.

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Figure 2. Dorsal View of the Leatherback Turtle Sighted at Kadmat Island. (Photo credit: Aboosayeed A.M.)

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