

**PRESS NOTE**

**DATE:21-06-2024**

On receipt of Intel from O/o the Wildlife Justice Commission, India, regarding illegal trading of marine animals, articles and derivatives at Vijayawada, the PCCF (WL), AP instructed the DFO, Vig-I and II and the DFO, NTR Vijayawada to investigate into the alleged crime.

Accordingly, the DFO, Vig-I and II and the DFO, NTR Vijayawada with staff accompanied the team of Wildlife Justice Commission, India and conducted raid at the premises of Sri S.Srinivasa Rao, Akshayanidhi Mart, Ayyappanagar, Vijayawada and noticed huge quantity of Sea fans (Soft Corals), dead and processed, many in form of costly frames, 2 deer skins, 5 Jackal tails, 162 porcupine quills and about 60 rare sea shells. Nearly all the above species are protected under Schedule-I of Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and entails up to 7 years rigorous imprisonment with minimum fine of Rs.25,000/- for their violations. Total value of the wildlife articles and derivatives were estimated at Rs.91.25 lakhs based on the advertised price and online sources.

The accused Sri S.Srinivasa Rao was taken into custody and produced before the 1<sup>st</sup> Class Magistrate at Vijayawada on June, 22<sup>nd</sup> and remanded to 15 days Judicial custody. Further investigation is in progress about the origin of the articles and derivatives, the trade network spanning from different coastal regions in India and international trade.

( 989 nos Sea fans & 200M of Sea fans kept in photo frames). seized along with other wildlife articles.

The accused was trading the marine articles and other wildlife products through online and offline mode at huge prices. He also advertised the Wildlife products through YouTube and other social media platform in the name of "Indrajal".

The Sea fans (Soft Corals), considered very rare and endangered animals, listed in Schedule-I, Part-K of Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and occur at Shallow deep sea waters of Tamilnadu, Gujarat, Lakshadweep, Andamans and Nicobar Islands and Sri Lanka. Any trade and possession of the said marine animals, articles of Schedule-I, Part-K is a non-bailable offence and cognizable, which is punishable with imprisonment for a period up to seven years with a minimum fine of Rs.25,000/-.

Following Officers were present at the search and seizure over ten hours.

- 1) Dr. Shekhar Kumar Niraj, IFS., India head of WJC and his team
- 2) Sri AVSRK Appanna, SFS., DFO, NTR Division, Vijayawada
- 3) Sri M. Ravi Sankar Sharma, SFS, DFO, Vig-I & II O/o the PCCF, AP, Mangalagiri and team.
- 4) Sri K.Srinivasula Reddy, Forest Range Officer, Vijayawada and his staff
- 5) Sri M. Sankaraiah, Forest Range Officer, Vig-I & II
- 6) Staff of Vigilance I & II and staff of Vijayawada Range.

District Forest Officer  
NTR Division, Vijayawada

## **BRIEF NOTE ON SEA FANS**

Sea fans ( Gorgonians) are one type of soft corals, which are very rare animals. Corals are listed under Schedule – I, (Part- K) Sl.no.8 (Family- *Alcyonacea*) Page no. 98 of wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 as amended upto 2022 of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and CITES listing under WPA 1972. Its possession or trade entails strict punishment of minimum (3) years and maximum punishment to (7) years under the WL (P) Act, 1972 read with procedure envisaged in Cr PC.

The Sea fans are invertebrate organisms that are grown in a fan like pattern and are found in shallow sea/coastal waters. Sea fans are an Anthozoan. Anthozoan means flowering animals. As per the statistics, there are only 212 species of Anthozoans currently existing in the world. It mainly includes sea whips and sea fans. The Anthozoan species are threatened to extinction according to IUCN. Sea fans are usually found in Bermuda, Florida and West Indies. They are present in shallow waters of certain identified regions of the Indian oceans, canal the Arabian seas, which are vulnerable and rare species and they need to be protected. They are considered highly endangered and rare and have significant roles in coastal ecosystem.







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