

Ship-hit adds to 'bleaching' woes of reef

Viju B | TNN

Mumbai: A cargo ship has run into a coral reef-rich area in Lakshadweep that is host to several endangered species and has already been battered by the El Nino current.

Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) assistant director Deepak Apte, who has researched coral reefs in Lakshadweep for eight years, said the disaster had occurred at the worst possible time as the reefs had been severely affected by the El Nino current this May, causing "bleaching" of over 80% of the reefs in Lakshadweep.

"Bleaching is a phenomenon in which the reefs turn white. This reef is already under stress and the latest mishap will create more problems. The reefs off Lakshadweep are known to be among the best in the world and host several endangered species. The accident site is a nesting area for endangered green sea turtles, the hawksbill turtle and the olive ridley turtles," Apte said.

The area also hosted whales, sharks, porpoises and dolphins. "These reefs have over 150 species of coral, 600 species of mollusc, 1,000 species of fish and 150 species of marine algae. BNHS has recorded over 40 new species in this area. The shipowners should be made to compensate for this extensive damage to the rich natural resources of the country," Apte said.