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Mediterranean Action Plan
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Introduction

The Mediterranean Conference on Marine Turtles, adopted formally by the Fourth Meeting of the National Focal Points for SPAs (Tunis, April 1999), aims to bring together field biologists, conservationists, government administrators and other professionals from all Mediterranean countries, involved in sea turtle research and conservation. The First Conference took place in Rome in October 2001 and in view of its success the Second Mediterranean Conference was decided at the Sixth Meeting of the National Focal Points for SPAs (Marseilles, 2003).

Organizational Aspects – Participation

The Second Mediterranean Conference on Marine Turtles took place in Kemer, about 40 km south of Antalya (Turkey) from 4 to 7 May 2005. The conference is a joint initiative by the Secretariats of the three International Conventions pertaining to the conservation of marine turtles in the Mediterranean, namely the Barcelona Convention (RAC/SPA), the Bern Convention and the Bonn Convention (CMS), with the scientific support of the IUCN/SSC's Marine Turtle Specialist Group (MTSG). The conference was locally hosted by the Ministry of Environment & Forestry and facilitated by WWF Turkey. The Scientific & Programme Committee comprised of Dimitris Margaritoulis (coordinator), Mohamed Nejmeddine Bradai, Paolo Casale, Andreas Demetropoulos, Jesus Tomas, and Oguz Turkozan. The received abstracts were organized in five thematic categories, i.e. Networking & Social Issues, Turtles at Sea, Nesting Populations, Ecology & Ecophysiology, Management & Conservation. The efficient organization and the excellent surroundings at the Mirage Park Resort assisted in the conference's pronounced success with 177 registered participants from 20 countries.

Participation and Main Events

The following events occurred during the conference main dates (4-7 May 2005): 3 introductory speeches (one from each International Convention), 8 key-note talks, 27 oral presentations, 43 poster contributions, 3 guided discussions (on the Mediterranean population of green turtles, on a proposal for the creation of a Mediterranean network, on the continuation of the Mediterranean conference), and 4 workshops (Fisheries Interactions, Regional Red Listing Assessments, Education, Tagging Standardization).

The Conference Programme and the Book of Abstracts can be downloaded from the conference website www.medturtleconf.net. If you wish a hard copy of the Book of Abstracts, please contact Dimitris Margaritoulis margaritoulis@archelon.gr providing your full postal address.

Highlights and Proceedings

Very important results came out of this conference, concerning the most recent scientific findings and developments associated with sea turtle research, management and conservation aspects in the Mediterranean region. Further, the need to work in a cooperative way was emphasised. This, in combination with the integration of socio-economic aspects, is a prerequisite for adopting sustainable solutions to the numerous contemporary problems. Most contributions will appear in the Proceedings, the edition of which was kindly undertaken by Andreas Demetropoulos and Oguz Turkozan. At the end of the conference the respective Session Chairs produced the Highlights of the Conference which can be seen in the Appendix 2.

The following recommendation could be drafted:

- There is a need to protect the already identified nesting sites
- Monitoring, tagging are to provide information on which to base conservation policy and actions. A standardisation is need for such activities
- There is further evidence of the importance of fisheries interaction and to undertake pilot study on tested methods (circle hook, TED's)
- Despite all the research and conservation activities are carried out on land, there is new discovery of nesting beaches in the eastern Mediterranean and in particular for green turtles.
- The value of training for conservation and tagging was emphasized as this would minimize the risks to turtles

Regional Meeting of the IUCN's MTSG

As a side event of the conference, the regional meeting of the IUCN's Marine Turtle Specialist Group took place on 5 May in the presence of the MTSG's Co-Chair Roderic Mast. The objectives of the group in the Mediterranean as well as membership issues were discussed and the use of the listserv "MedTurtle" for email exchange between groups and individuals was emphasized.

Pre-Conference Meetings

Prior the conference two Working Groups convened on 2 & 3 May 2005:

1. Working Group on Tagging. This Working Group, organized by RAC/SPA after a recommendation at the Sixth Meeting of National Focal Points for SPAs (Marseilles, 2003), prepared the Workshop on the Standardization of Tagging and Centralization of Information.

2. Working Group on Red List Assessments. On 3 May another Working Group, formulated by the IUCN's MTSG, elaborated on the Regional Red List Assessments of the three species of marine turtles found in the Mediterranean. The need for developing regional assessments of sea turtles has been highlighted on numerous occasions over the past several years. The Working Group consisted of 7 members: Jeffrey Seminoff (MTSG Red List Chair, USA), Dimitris Margaritoulis (MTSG Mediterranean Regional Chair, Greece), Juan Antonio Camiñas (Spain), Paolo Casale (Italy), Andreas Demetropoulos (Cyprus), Yakup Kaska (Turkey), and Bojan Lazar (Croatia). Updates for each of the three sea turtle species in the Mediterranean that are being assessed with the IUCN Red List Criteria were presented; the Mediterranean green turtle (coordinated by Andreas Demetropoulos), the loggerhead (coordinated by Bojan Lazar), and the leatherback (coordinated by Paolo Casale). Further, participants discussed several issues pertaining to the Regional Red Lists such as, (1) the determination of Index Sites, (2) the finer details about the 2001 IUCN Red List Criteria, (3) the applicability of the Red List Criteria to each sea turtle species, (4) the use and method of extrapolations, and (5) the development of a timeline for completing the assessments. Each of the assessments is currently in preparation. The first goal is to have the initial drafts completed by November 2005 so that they can be posted on the MTSG website for internal review. The final assessments will be presented at the 26th International Sea Turtle Symposium in Greece (see below).

Next Mediterranean Conference

A great improvement in the works of this conference was the consideration to develop a mechanism which would facilitate the smooth continuation of this important regional event in the years to come. Analysing the organizational drawbacks of the previous and current conferences, and specifically the difficulty in taking decisions, Marco Barbieri (CMS Secretariat) proposed to draw ideas from existing successful examples, e.g. the International Sea Turtle Symposium. To this regard, it was decided that at each conference, the Country of the next conference should be proposed as well as a Chairperson, who will undertake the responsibility of coordinating decision-making and of the timely implementation of the conference.

Proposals for the next Country and Chairperson should be elaborated and brought forward by a Nominations Committee. This general scheme was accepted by the participants and in order to have the mechanism ready by the next conference, it was decided that, as a provisional procedure, the next Country and Chair should be ideally selected in this conference. A proposal to have the next conference in Tunisia (in about spring 2008) under the Chairmanship of Mohamed Nejmeddine Bradai was readily accepted. Further, a Nominations Committee, with the task to investigate and propose at the conference in Tunisia the next Country and Chair, was formulated after a proposal by the Marine Turtle Specialist Group. The persons comprising the Nominations Committee are Dimitris Margaritoulis (coordinator), Monica

Aureggi, Abdulmaula Hamza, Yakup Kaska, and Jesus Tomas. The Committee will draft and circulate the basic selection criteria in order to assist colleagues wishing to undertake this important regional event.

The 26th International Sea Turtle Symposium

It was announced that the 26th International Sea Turtle Symposium will take place in Greece (Island of Crete, 2-8 April 2006). The Symposium is convened by the International Sea Turtle Society (ISTS) and it traditionally goes to the ISTS current President's home country. Dimitris Margaritoulis of ARCHELON, the Sea Turtle Protection Society of Greece, has been elected President of the ISTS for the term 1 May 2005 through 30 April 2006 and thus the Symposium goes to Greece. It is the first time that this global Symposium comes in the Mediterranean region and thus all marine turtle workers in the Mediterranean should be encouraged to participate and Mediterranean countries and International organizations, active in the Mediterranean, should support this important event. It was emphasized that the Symposium in Greece is a great opportunity to present to a global audience the scientific work done in the Mediterranean and also an opportunity to convene again a Mediterranean meeting and continue the team work on the various open regional issues. For this reason, a 1- or 2-day Mediterranean meeting (depending on the amount of business) will be scheduled either for 4 April or 3 & 4 April 2006 and Paolo Casale <paolo.casale@tiscali.it> is the coordinator of the Mediterranean meeting in the context of the International Symposium.

Field Trip

The Conference terminated with a field trip to nearby Cirali, which hosts a loggerhead nesting beach. The local community there is very active and in the form of a cooperative protects the nesting beach and conducts an eco-tourism project, in cooperation with WWF Turkey.

Thanks

On behalf of the Organizing Committee thanks should be extended to all participants, invited speakers, committee members, contributors, session chairs, workshop & discussion coordinators, facilitators, and donors. Special thanks are due to the Turkish Ministry of Environment & Forestry and the personnel of WWF Turkey, without whom the conference wouldn't have recorded this pronounced success.

Appendix 1: WORKSHOPS

WORKSHOP ON EDUCATION

Turtle Education for Tourists: identifying best practice

Efforts to conserve turtles will not succeed without adequate public understanding and support. Yet the negative pressures the tourist industry is exerting upon the turtle nesting beaches in the Mediterranean continue to increase despite the disproportionate growth of nature oriented tourist sector. With the need for effective 'turtle education' for tourists having never been greater, this workshop will seek to draw upon participants' knowledge and experience in order to identify the key parameters that comprise a basic 'curriculum', devise a common approach that can be shared and applied in practice, and discuss an appropriate strategy for its implementation.

WORKSHOP ON FISHERIES INTERACTIONS

Interaction of sea turtles with fisheries in the Mediterranean: possible and priority conservation measures

More and more evidence is becoming available that fishing-induced mortality is a major threat for sea turtles in the Mediterranean. Each year turtles are probably killed in large numbers by fishing gears such as drifting long line, bottom trawl, and static nets. Although the problem is far from being completely understood, nevertheless available information is enough to urge immediate actions to reduce this threat. Several different approaches can be adopted, from reduction of fishing effort to mitigation measures, and some of them have been proposed and tested in other areas. This workshop aims at gathering together those interested in the problem of sea turtle by catch in the Mediterranean in order to: (a) enhance future cooperation on this fundamental conservation issue; (b) share knowledge, experience and opinions on what is the present situation and which are the hot-spots in the region; (c) discuss possible approaches suitable for the specific Mediterranean situation.

WORKSHOP ON TAGGING STANDARDIZATION

In the Mediterranean region, there is need for standardization of different tagging techniques and at the same time there is a need to promote uniform data collection and reciprocal exchange of information within the region. A regional dissemination of information would improve the understanding of many different aspects of Mediterranean Sea turtle populations, highlighting conservation needs. A working group has been set up by the Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (RAC/SPA) and this group is meeting just prior to the Conference. The report of the workshop is presented as UNEP(DEC)/MED WG.270/Inf.24.

WORKSHOP ON REGIONAL RED LISTING

One of the main functions of the Marine Turtle Specialist Group (MTSG) is to conduct Red List Assessments for marine turtle species based on a set of criteria that are defined by the IUCN. In this context, the MTSG undertakes global assessments of all marine turtle species. However, a regional approach has many advantages, mainly in respect of conservation priorities. Mediterranean Sea is a closed sea with its own nesting populations of *Caretta caretta* and *Chelonia mydas*. It is therefore an example area to implement a Regional Red Listing exercise. For this reason a 6-member Working Group has been formulated and will work before the Conference. The Working Group will present an initial report for discussion, within the Conference, during the scheduled Workshop on Red Listing.

Appendix 2:

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CONFERENCE

(drafted by the Scientific & Programme Committee of the Conference)

Session 1: Networking and Social Issues (by Jesus Tomas)

The main points underlined were:

- The importance of public awareness for the sea turtle conservation, in order to avoid threats such as direct consumption of turtles (still occurring in some countries of the Mediterranean) or environmental loss. The awareness must be carried out on all target groups, from local people to national authorities and using the media.
- The importance of recording/studying turtle strandings for assessing threats at sea. In order to improve the actions and studies on strandings, it has been of special relevance the creation and first steps of networking among sea turtle rescue centres in Mediterranean countries. Such a network would let the exchanging of expertise and the sharing of information between members improving the quality of their tasks. In addition, this network can be a good body to influence policy makers, leading to a more efficient conservation of sea turtles in the Mediterranean.

Session 2: Turtles at Sea (by Paolo Casale)

- Sea turtles are marine animals spending all life at sea, with just an exceptional, though fundamental, presence at land. However, traditionally most of the research and conservation activity is carried out at land.
- Fortunately, this disequilibrium is rapidly changing, as shown by the number of oral and poster presentations dealing with turtles at sea in this conference. These studies are contributing to understand where, when and how, turtles of different origin go and distribute in the Mediterranean.
- The classic flipper tagging still provides useful insights, though satellite telemetry can clarify aspects otherwise impossible to investigate, and new tracking devices are promising.
- Other studies on turtles-at-sea improve our knowledge on the threats the Mediterranean populations are facing, providing further evidence of the importance of fishery interactions but also on other factors like boat strikes.

Session 3: Nesting Populations (by Oguz Turkozan)

- The improving knowledge is showing that the importance of nesting beach is not only associated with the number of nests. For instance genetics and sex ratios should be taken into consideration.
- There is a need of detailed research for the discovery of new possible nesting sites in the eastern Mediterranean.
- There is a need to protect the already identified nesting sites.

Session 4: Ecology and Ecophysiology (by Mohamed Nejmeddine Bradai)

- On sex-ratio and eggs incubation:
 - o Temporal and spatial sex-ratio variation in the loggerhead nests to be considered during nest relocation activities.
 - o Concerning the global warming phenomenon, a high conservation priority should be given to the beaches producing a male biased sex-ratio.
- On the physical characteristic of the nesting beaches:
 - o Coastal degradation decreases the success of the nesting activity.
- In addition to the classic assessment of the nesting effort, several ecological factors were studied. In the same way the development of stranding networks and sea turtle rescue centres allowed the development of epibiont study and feeding ecology. The stranding studies should be encouraged.

Session 5: Management and Conservation (by Andreas Demetropoulos)

The session highlighted the following:

- What is conservation and what is not. Monitoring, tagging etc are not conservation measures. Their aims are to provide information on which to base conservation policy and actions. So far conservation measures have focussed mainly on beaches not at sea.
- The need to apply up-to-date knowledge and techniques in turtle conservation projects on nesting beaches, relating *inter alia* to predation, was stressed. It includes issues such as:
 - o The use of non-magnetic material for protective cages or grills for protecting nest.
 - o Protection nests *in situ* wherever possible (implies that beaches need to be protected).
 - o Disturbing nests and hatching process as little as possible during the efforts to protect the nests (no digging for locating chambers, no digging up hatched nests in less than 3 days after hatching).
 - o Predator population control.

- The value of training for conservation was emphasized as this would minimize the risks to turtles.
- The progress made in passing legislation protecting and managing critical areas for turtle conservation and more so the willingness in implementing such legislation was reviewed for a number of countries (Cyprus, Malta, Turkey).
- Raising public awareness and education issues were presented and discussed. They were deemed as prerequisites to effective conservation. The channels and modalities used need to be appropriate to target groups.