





## **The Second Mediterranean Conference on Marine Turtles**

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The Second Mediterranean Conference on Marine Turtles took place in Kemer, (4-7 May 2005 Antalya, Turkey). The Conference was a great success with 177 registered participants from 20 countries. The Conference was locally hosted by the Turkish Ministry of Environment and Forestry and facilitated by WWF-Turkey. The efficient organization and the excellent surroundings at the Mirage Park Hotel assisted in the Conference's success.

The following events occurred during the Conference (see Book of Abstract at [www.medturtleconf.net](http://www.medturtleconf.net)):

- 3 Introductory speeches
- 8 Key-note talks
- 27 Oral presentations organised on 5 thematic session (Networking and Social issues, Turtles at Sea, Nesting Populations, Ecology and Ecophysiology, Management and conservation)
- 43 Poster contributions
- 3 Guided Discussions (Green turtles, Mediterranean Network, Next Conference)
- 4 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.

### **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.

- 1 Meeting (regional meeting of the IUCN's MTSG Mediterranean members)

Prior to the conference (2 & 3 May 2005) two Working Groups elaborated the following topics:

1. Tagging Standardization (organized by RAC/SPA)
2. Regional Red Listing Assessment (organized by the IUCN's MTSG)

Outlines on the work of both Working Groups were presented at the respective Workshops within the Conference.

Further, it has been decided that the Conference Proceedings' Editors will be Andreas Demetropoulos and Oguz Turkozan. Instructions for authors and other details will be forwarded soon.

A great improvement for the smooth continuation of this important regional event was the decision to develop a mechanism which would facilitate the timely organization of the Mediterranean Conference in the years to come.

To this regard, it was proposed that the next Conference will be hosted in Tunisia (in about spring 2008). 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 IUCN's Marine Turtle Specialist Group. Soon the Committee will draft and circulate some basic criteria for colleagues who wish to undertake this event.

The 26<sup>th</sup> Sea Turtle Symposium (Crete, Greece, 4-8 April 2006) is a great opportunity to continue the regional work. For this reason, a 1- or 2-day Mediterranean meeting is scheduled during this international gathering.

## **Highlights of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mediterranean Conference**

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### **Session 1: Networking and Social Issues**

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 of turtle rescue centres in Mediterranean countries and first steps of networking among them. 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**

- 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**

- 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**

- 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**

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 and 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.