

## MEDASSET'S RESEARCH PROJECTS AROUND THE MEDITERRANEAN (1990-1994)

Lily VENIZELOS

MEDASSET, 1c Licavitou street, 10672 Athens, Greece

One of MEDASSET's prime objectives is the concerted effort to thoroughly survey the coastal areas of the Mediterranean in order to identify the presence of sea turtle (Loggerhead, *Caretta caretta*, and Green, *Chelonia mydas*) in these areas. Specific ecology of the coastal regions is logged as turtles cannot be successfully protected unless all their reproductive habitat is known. Recommendations for implementation of protective measures are made to the states involved if any important ecosystems or turtle nesting sites are found.

A. The coastal area of the North Aegean Sea, mainland and islands, totalling 2,000km was surveyed in 1991. Beach types and hind-beach sand dunes were documented. No significant turtle nesting was found in the region, probably due to unfavourable climatic conditions in the North of the Mediterranean. However, a large non-nesting population was present at sea. (Co-funded by the EC).

B. Nesting site and sand dune assessment of Sardinia, covering 750 km of coast, with emphasis on the Gulf of Orosei was undertaken in 1990 and 91. The reported exploitation of marine turtles was also investigated. Turtle nesting in the Western Mediterranean is almost non-existent nowadays. The aim of the project was to discover whether Sardinia was a final nesting possibility in this area of the Mediterranean. However, tourism had almost completely overrun the beaches making nesting almost impossible. A continuing presence of adult and sub-adult Loggerhead off shore was confirmed but no evidence of turtle nesting was found. (co-funded by the EC).

C. The first ever survey of Syria's 200 km coast was undertaken in 1991, investigating the possible occurrence of nesting sea turtles. The Syrian Coast is possibly the most polluted in the Mediterranean, with plastic waste covering much of the beach splash zone and raw sewage being piped directly into the sea. Despite of this a turtle nesting presence was discovered. Indeed one beach, between Jeble and Latakia, was found to contain a concentration of nesting activity but all nests had suffered from complete predation, probably due to humans. Protection of this beach region from touristic or industrial development is recommended. (Co-funded by HCI [UK] and MEDASSET).

D. In 1993, Phase I of surveying the Egyptian Mediterranean coast, from Alexandria to El Salum, was completed. These 600 km of coast was documented according to its physical and biological characteristics. Loggerhead turtles were found to nest there in small numbers. This was the first documented occurrence of marine turtles nesting in this area. Pollution was rife in some localities and touristic development is progressing rapidly, both are threatening to destroy some ecologically unique and important coastal regions. (Co-financed by MEDASSET, RAC/SPA Tunisia and NIOF Alexandria -in kind).

E. The sixth year of an ongoing assessment of the incidental catches of Loggerhead turtles on swordfish long lines in the Greek Ionian Waters was completed in 1994. It is run by Archipelagos in collaboration with the captains of up to eight vessels based on the island of Kefalonia. Turtles are caught in 25% of the fishing trips. Most commonly, one turtle is caught per long line but up to three have been recorded. A majority of turtles caught are juveniles (less than 75cm long). Vital size, sex and capture location data of the turtles is being recorded by the fishermen. The turtles are returned, invariably alive, with hooks still in their mouths, back to the sea. This project has been the perpetrator of a positive attitude towards the turtles by the otherwise impartial captains. (Archipelagos project, Co-financed by GAWF [UK], MEDASSET and Archipelagos).



MEDASSET ACTIVITIES 1990-1993

### REFERENCES

- KASPAREK M. 1991, Marine Turtles in Greece. Results of a Survey of Potential Nesting Beaches in the Northern Aegean. 160 pp. Unpubl. Report.
- KASPAREK M. 1993, Marine Turtle Conservation in the Mediterranean : Marine turtles in Egypt. Survey of the Mediterranean Coast Between Alexandria and El Salum. Phase I. 74 pp. Unpubl. Report.
- KASPAREK M. 1994, Marine Turtles in the Mediterranean : Marine Turtles in Syria. Survey of the Syrian Coast. 20pp. Unpubl. Report, available from MEDASSET.
- PANOU A., ANTYPAS G., GIANOPOULOS Y., MOURELATOS D., CH. & G., MOSCHONAS S., TOUMAZATOS P., TSELENTIS L., VOUSINAS N. & VOUSINAS V., 1992. Incidental catches of Loggerhead turtles, *Caretta caretta*, in Swordfish Long Lines in the Ionian Sea, Greece. B.C.G. *Testudo* 3(4) 47-57.
- PANOU A. et al. 1989/90/91/93. Incidental Catches of Loggerhead Turtles, *Caretta caretta*, in Swordfish Long Lines in the Ionian Sea, Greece. Unpubl. Reports. Available from MEDASSET.
- WITMORE C., JESU R. and REYNOLDS P., 1991, Sardinia. An Assessment of Beaches for Loggerhead Turtle Nesting. 50pp. Unpubl. Report. Available from MEDASSET.

V