

SIX YEARS OF SURVEY (2004-2009) ON REPRODUCTION OF SEA TURTLES ON SHKAÏFATE BEACH, SYRIAN COAST (PROPOSED AS PROTECTED AREA)

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Abstract

Nesting turtles survey between 2004 – 2009 were conducted along the coast between Shkaifat and Snawbar (south of Lattakia city), along a 12.5 km stretch of coast. Results from the 2004- 2009 nesting season confirmed that a skaifat- snawbar beach near Latakia in Syria was an important nesting site for green turtles in the Mediterranean

Keywords: *Beach, Conservation, Turtles, Levantine Basin, Monitoring*

Introduction

The presence of loggerhead and green sea turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) and loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*), off the coast of Syria, was first reported by Gruvel [1], but nesting on the country's beaches was not indicated. The next turtle information to come out of Syria resulted from a rapid assessment survey in 1991 that identified low-level nesting concentrated on a beach south of Latakia City [2]. Local researchers noted incidental turtle captures in beach seines, and also observed turtles stranded along the coast [3]. Since 2004 a more extensive coastal survey was undertaken, primarily to better identify Syria's actual and potential nesting populations [4].

Material and Methods

From last week of May to second week of October the 7.5 km beach between North Jableh and Snowbar, 35°28'00"N, 35°51'45"E was surveyed in the early morning for evidence of sea turtle nesting, nest hatching and events that may have affected the incubation of nests, such as inundation by storm waves or depredation. The adjoining beach to the north, from Snowbar to the river Al Kabir Ash Shamali next to Lattakia, 5 km to the north, was surveyed, as a continuation of the daily survey, 10 times at weekly intervals to record the same information.

Emergence tracks from adult turtles were checked for species and evidence of nesting and the track recorded as either a nesting or non-nesting emergence... Nesting species was determined by appearance of the track [5] and by maximum width of the track. In the eastern Mediterranean, loggerhead turtles are generally far smaller than green turtles, and hence their track widths are generally much narrower. Additionally nest excavation often afforded confirmation of species by identification of dead or live hatchlings or embryos. For determining the movement of sea turtles during and after the reproduction period, we tagged 64 individual during 2004- 2009 by metal tags contain the name and address of the team leader.

Results and Discussion

During 2004, 2006, 2008 and 2009 we noticed 8, 15 and 21 nests in each kilometer (respectively) for the green turtle *Chelonia mydas*, as for *Caretta caretta*, we recorded many nests and spawning sites in the same beach, but in less number (Fig 1). During 2005 and 2007, the number of nest very lower (3 and 2 nest per km of the beach). These results indicate that this surveyed area is among the best sixth coastal zones suitable for the reproduction of the green sea turtles all round the Mediterranean coast. Syria may also play a significant role hosting foraging turtles, as loggerheads from both Cyprus and Greece have been shown to forage in near shore Syrian waters [6]. Since green turtle *Chelonia mydas* nesting was discovered in 2004, repeated surveys have indicated that Latakia beach hosts a regionally important rookery. This, together with the presence of lower frequency nesting at a few other beaches places Syria as the third most important country, after Turkey and Cyprus, for green turtle nesting in the Mediterranean. Gerosa and Casale [7] indicate that interaction of sea turtles with fisheries in the Mediterranean is a major threat and that little is known of the level of incidental turtle captures in Syria. Since 2007. We undertaken a field work concerning this problem.

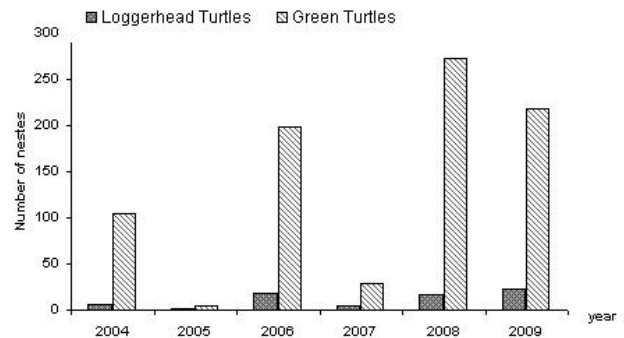


Fig. 1. Variation of the number of nest turtles : loggerhead and green) on Lattakia beach during six years of survey

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