

IN 2008:

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- 384 were green turtle clutches
- 194 were loggerhead turtle clutches
- Over 3000 people partook in an organised turtle watch or hatchling release

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TURTLE NEWS 2009

ISSUE 17

Greens Galore: Bumper year for green nests!

The 2008 season proved very popular with the turtles of the Mediterranean. Throughout the season a total of 583 clutches were laid on the beaches we patrol. Of these, 384 clutches belonged to green turtle's (*Chelonia mydas*), 194 clutches were loggerhead turtle's (*Caretta caretta*) and for 5 the species was not identified. This was an incredibly high number of clutches, particularly for the greens who's numbers had been significantly lower in the previous season. On the beaches of Alagadi and the West coast an astounding 63% increase in the number of clutches compared with the previous season was recorded. This increase can be wholly attributed to the increase in green clutches (Figure 1a). In comparison the number of loggerhead clutches dropped substantially to their lowest number since 1993 (Figure 1b).

Furthermore, during the 2008 season at least 65% of loggerhead and 88% of green turtle clutches hatched, a very positive number for both species.

Whilst the increase in green numbers is an



Volunteers from 2008 with a nesting green turtle at dawn

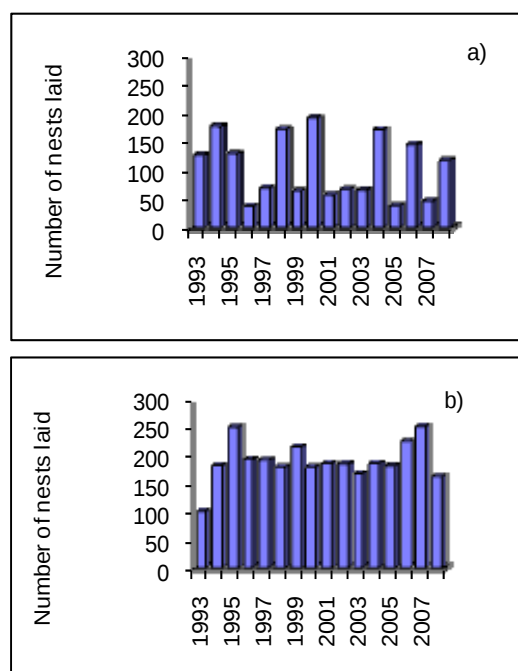


Figure 1. Number of a) green turtle and b) loggerhead turtle clutches recorded on the north and west coast beaches, 1993-2008.

obvious cause for celebration, the number of clutches in these 'bumper' years has still shown a steady decline since 2000, although the frequency of these years has increased. Basically this means we should not count our chickens quite yet, we still have a way to go!

Unfortunately the state of play for the loggerhead's is far more concerning with nesting showing a dramatic decrease after previous years steady increase. We hope that the previous two seasons ('06-'07) exceptionally high numbers have meant that many of the population remain in the interbreeding period, as turtles do not nest every year. This only serves to reiterate the importance of the continuation of the data collection on the beaches of Northern Cyprus. Recording the data is crucial to further understanding the nesting trends of these fascinating species which is vital to aid in their future protection and conservation.

For more information on previous trends and nesting information check out:
www.seaturtle.org/mtrg

Project History



Visitors are always welcome at the main base, the 'Goatshed' in Alagadi where information and souvenirs are available.

"Over 3000 people partook in an organised turtle watch or hatchling release in the 2008 season. This constitutes a valuable tourist attraction in Northern Cyprus"

Tourists enjoying one of the many hatchling releases that take place from late July to late August



The project began back in 1992 when Brendan Godley and Annette Broderick put together a research expedition, the purpose of which was to determine the numbers of marine turtles nesting on the beaches of Northern Cyprus. It also aimed to study the threats to the breeding population of green and loggerhead turtles that visit the island each year to mate and lay. This was a response to a request for help from SPOT (Society for the Protection of Turtles), a local group concerned with marine turtle conservation. Since then, students from universities all over the UK and elsewhere have given up their summers to volunteer on the project and carry out much-needed research and

conservation work in conjunction with both SPOT and the local Department for Environmental Protection, thus forming the Marine Turtle Conservation Project (MTCP).

Over the years many scientific journals have been published as a result of the research efforts of the project, concerning many diverse topics from satellite tracking of marine turtles to the effects of sand temperature on the sex of hatchlings. The MTCP was also instrumental in proclaiming the combined beaches of Alagadi the 5th most important nesting beaches for green turtles in the Mediterranean. Even more importantly it helped to

gain Alagadi status as a Specially Protected Area (SPA) in 1997, the first of its kind in Northern Cyprus.

There are two species of marine turtle that nest in the Mediterranean; the loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*) and the green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), both of which nest in Northern Cyprus and are considered regionally endangered. These turtles nest on many beaches around the island and as well as Alagadi the project monitors beaches along the North and West Coasts and at the Karpas Peninsula, the home of Ronnas Bay, the 3rd most important nesting beach in the whole Mediterranean.

Tourist-tastic

Although the project is supported by a number of organisations; seaturtle.org, Turkcell (Kuzey Kibris), Lupe Reisen, Erwin Warth Foundation, Animal Care, Atanco, British Chelonia Group, The British High Commission, Kibris Turkish Airlines, British Residents' Society, NERC and the Royal Society amongst others, a vast majority of the projects funding comes from donations from you, the

visitors, as well as from the volunteers themselves who cover their own costs in order to participate in the project. All turtle watch experiences are free, the project does not charge individuals to attend turtle tours, but we do greatly appreciate any donations given. In the 2008 season over 3000 people partook in an organised turtle watch or hatchling release. This constitutes a valuable tourist attraction in Northern Cyprus giving turtles and their conservation a tangible value in the economy. Throughout the nesting season visitors are encouraged to participate in night watches to see these extraordinary creatures laying. Later in the season, the attraction switches to watching the tiny hatchlings



Checking a loggerhead turtle's tags on night watch

making their first perilous journey to the water. We would like to extend our greatest thanks to all the supporters of the project for all you do both for the project and the volunteers throughout the season and throughout the year in our absence.

Turtle Tracked: 2008's Satellite Carrier



Project leader Robin Snape attaching the transmitter to a loggerhead turtle

Over the past several years the project has been carrying out a tracking programme to see where our turtles roam. In the 2008 season we were awaiting the arrival of two suitable loggerhead turtles to which we could attach transmitters. They needed to be small in size, and returnees to Alagadi. We would know this by checking to see if they had PIT or flipper tags and by cross-referencing the numbers with ones that we had recorded in previous years.

Unfortunately with the season being so quiet for loggerheads we thought that

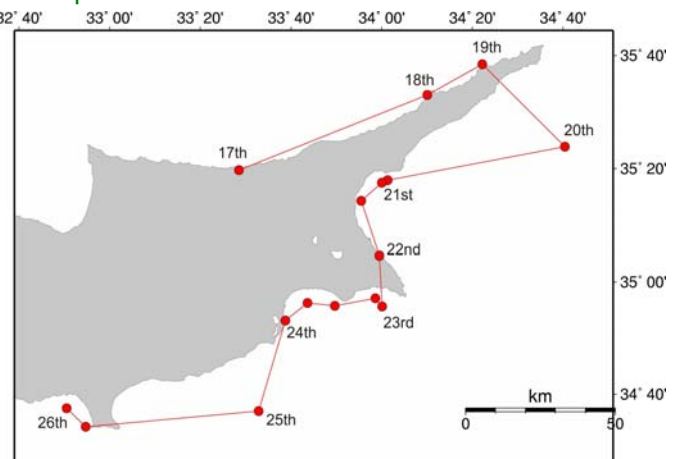
suitable candidates would never arrive, but luckily for us late in the nesting season a perfect loggerhead came ashore. The volunteers were as quick to react as ever and soon the unassuming turtle was in a box ready for its transmitter! Attaching the transmitter doesn't harm or hurt the turtle but takes a bit of time to complete. First the shell is sanded smooth and any barnacles removed, then the transmitter is attached with resin that will keep the transmitter attached for as long as possible. Every time the turtle surfaces the transmitter transmits data on dive profiles and the position of the turtle to a main computer where the data are recorded.

This year our little loggerhead showed an unusual migration route staying extremely close to the shores of Cyprus. In previous years we have

tracked loggerheads down to the coasts of Egypt and Libya as well as along the coast of Syria and up to Turkey and Greece so this little loggerhead seems to be sticking close to what she knows.

Turtles always go back to the beach from which they hatched to lay so hopefully we'll see this little one again in the future.

If you wish to follow the progress of this turtle or see where our other turtles have been in the past visit: www.seaturtle.org/tracking/?project_id=156



Map showing the route of the loggerhead

A Dogs Dinner

Predation of the clutches is one of the main problems facing the turtles of Northern Cyprus that the project is working its hardest to combat. A clutch of eggs and hatchlings makes for a great dogs dinner, or hedgehogs snack and crabs and foxes can also be a problem. Everyday all around Northern Cyprus beaches are patrolled and clutches are found and covered with wire cages that prevent the sneaky little critters from getting their paws on our hatchlings. In the 2008 season the incidences of predation were



A predated nest surrounded by discarded egg shells

12.6% for loggers and 3.3% for greens respectively. The differences in predation rates are due to the greens laying their clutches so much deeper in the sand.

Other threats to the clutches include inundation by the tide which effectively drowns the eggs and infection of the nest by larvae. Unfortunately there is little we can do about larvae but if a clutch is laid too close to the shore we can relocate it. Lets hope that this year we can reduce the incidences of predation and inundation even more to give our hatchlings a fighting chance!

"A nest of eggs and hatchlings makes for a great dogs dinner or hedgehogs snack"

Diary of a Volunteer....

Merhaba...throughout the season the volunteers work tirelessly to help to protect these sensational creatures. For the past few seasons Cyprus Today Newspaper has been a supporter of the project and has had a weekly column entitled Diary of a Volunteer telling the story of the volunteers experiences throughout the season. Below is a brief recount of the 2008 season.

"The 2008 season was a hard one, with few volunteers and never ending streams of turtles. With only a few returnee volunteers from previous seasons volunteering early on, training had to be quick and concise, and soon new volunteers were let loose on the beaches to track the turtles themselves. When the project was thrown into the deep end and also asked to monitor activities at the Karpas Peninsula there was certainly no time for slacking! At the lowest point with

only ten volunteers and three bases to monitor resources were stretched to the max, but it made for a fantastic experience.

Along the way with the arrival of new volunteers morale got ever stronger and it was incredible to see the transition from a lowly bunch of students to a fully functioning research centre where the skills we all gained were invaluable for the future. With the increase in numbers rewards became possible and pool parties were the volunteer's favorite past-time! It was

certainly an experience never to be forgotten."

To read more about last seasons antics, check out;

www.whatson-northcyprus.com

and search Diary of a Volunteer to find reprints of the column.



Volunteers from the 2008 season at the Olive House



Newsletter by
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ONCE AGAIN A GREAT BIG THANK YOU TO ALL THE PROJECTS SUPPORTERS!