

A four-monthly newsletter of ARCHELON, the Sea Turtle Protection Society of Greece

TURTLE TRACKS



Issue: 39

September - December 2007

Editor: T. Benos-Palmer

Design: J. Margaritoulis

Contributions by:

T. Benos-Palmer, C. Dean,
N. Vallianos, T. Karkoulia,
O. Karadaki, K. Fasoulas,
P. Goumenaki, A. Tsekoura



Solomou 57, GR-104 32 Athens, Greece

Tel-Fax: +30 210 52 31 342

e-mail: stps@archelon.gr

URL: www.archelon.gr



Just after the wild forest fires in Peloponnesus and before the general elections, the government allotted a large coastal area to the local Municipality of Zaharo, with development plans in mind that pose a major threat to this ecologically sensitive area. ARCHELON along with other three NGOs (Hellenic Society for the Protection of Nature, Hellenic Society for the Protection of the Environment and the Cultural Heritage, Mediterranean SOS) issued a Press Release on 13 September 2007, a summary of which is presented below.

DOES CONCRETE FOLLOW FOREST FIRES?

Following the tragic wild fires, our attention, as NGOs, is focused in restoring the devastated natural areas.

Every crisis is also an opportunity. The fire-stricken areas have the opportunity to either follow the example of Kalamata which after the disastrous earthquakes, years ago, managed to restore its historical center or the example of Grevena which after the earthquakes didn't manage to maintain the unique architectural characteristics of the blighted villages.

The region of Zaharo is an area of great ecological importance. Part of the area has been placed in NATURA 2000 Network, under the codes 2330005 "Dunes and coastal forest of Zaharo, Lake Kaiafa, Strofilia

and Kakovatos" and 2550005 "Dunes of Kyparissia". Zaharo, apart from a beautiful coastal forest and a unique lake, hosts a coastal zone with pristine sand dunes which form part of the second most important nesting area of loggerhead turtles in the Mediterranean. In these ecologically sensitive areas the fires showed their most vicious face.

Beyond doubt, an integrated plan for property damages and nature restoration is required in the region as well as an overall plan for sustainable development. Instead we had the signing of a Programme Agreement between the Public Real Estate Corporation and the Municipality of Zaharo. The agreement allows the local Municipality to exploit 2650 acres of the coastal zone for the next 70

years, by means of constructing hotels and other facilities.

As the burnt forests are still smoking, it is natural that investors race to these particularly beautiful areas for immediate development plans. There should be no decision taken until it becomes clear that:

- The designated sites of the NATURA 2000 Network will be protected.
- There will be no building in forest areas as well as no construction works degrading the coastal sand dune zone.
- The development should be based on the promotion and protection of the natural wealth of the area which comprises a major comparative advantage.

SHORT ARCHELON NEWS



It is not the first time that yachtsmen from the USA, members of the Olympic Circle Sailing Club (OCSC), visited ARCHELON's Rescue Centre in Glyfada. They were guided around the facility, received information and at the end adopted two seriously wounded turtles. We thank them warmly and we wish them pleasant sailings in the Aegean Sea and that they encounter only healthy turtles, dolphins, seals and other charming marine animals.

Olga Karadaki, our Coordinator on Crete for the last three years, has left the Society at the end of the year. Olga has been an excellent person and collaborator. Of Cretan origin, she was able to communicate very well with the locals, something absolutely necessary in order to manage a nature-conservation project on this very unique island. We wish her good luck in her new job.

EuroCharity is a socially-responsive firm that owns, publishes and daily updates Greece's only bi-lingual (Greek and English) Corporate Social Responsibility Directory and organises events promoting CSR. EuroCharity receives sponsorships, of which 25% are mandated for NGOs in Greece. To decide which NGOs should receive the financial support, EuroCharity conducted an electronic survey. The result was the following: from a total of 1030 votes, ARCHELON received 299 and got the second place. The first place was taken by the NGO "Doctors of the World" with 307 votes. We thank from our heart all those who voted for us.

ARCHELON participated, at the invitation of the Swedish Fisheries Secretariat, in a workshop convened in December 2007 in Gothenburg, Sweden. The Workshop focused on providing scientific advice for marine environmental management to decision makers and stakeholders. Our long-standing experience in passing scientific knowledge to the public was much appreciated.

PRESENTATION OF ARCHELON'S 2007 WORK

On Sunday, 16 December 2007, at the Rescue Centre in Glyfada, the annual presentation of ARCHELON's work took place. After a welcome opening by the President of the Society, Anna Kremezi-Margaritouli, a general picture was drawn by the Director Theodoros Benos-Palmer focusing on new collaborations and progress achieved. Theoni Karkouli, our Communications Officer, presented the publicity given to ARCHELON by the national & international media, which was increased in the last months. The Environmental Education programme, which has been upgraded recently with new material to cover novel issues, like the climate change, was presented by its coordinator, Athina Tsekoura, and also by Smaro Touliatou, responsible for ARCHELON's kids team (ChelonoParea). Penelope Goumenaki and Olga Karadaki presented the work on Crete and the difficulties encountered as to the changing of campsites at Rethymno and Chania. Kimon Fasoulas, Coordinator of the Koroni project, gave an outline of the work done in this area with its successes and difficulties. Then, the results of the



overall monitoring work, prepared by ARCHELON's Scientific Officer Christopher Dean, were presented raising major concerns on the continuing decline of nest numbers at Rethymno and Chania. The Projects Coordinator Aliko Panagopoulou presented the statistics of ARCHELON's Volunteer Programme, a very precious human resource. Finally, Paul Tsaros, Coordinator of the Rescue Network and the Rescue Centre, talked about the recorded strandings all over Greece, the admitted injured turtles, their rehabilitation procedures, and the releases effected during 2007.

ARCHELON'S 24TH BIRTHDAY ...

On Saturday 24 November 2007 ARCHELON celebrated its 24th birthday with its members, volunteers, and friends who were invited at the Rescue Centre in Glyfada. The sweet night, the full moon and the high spirits of the many young turtlers created an excellent atmosphere among the about 40 people who enjoyed the food, drinks and dance, among them the Society's founders Dimitris and Anna Margaritoulis.



I would like to forget

The following e-mail message was received from Nikos Filipopoulos after the devastating fires of August 2007. Nikos, together with Christophoros Panagopoulos fought on the fire fronts as volunteer firefighters.

I would like to forget the 3-4 sheep which we were not able to remove from the pen and which we heard squealing as the fire approached and that small dog which remained silent and tied up to the moment when in panic it realized there was no escape. Its masters were away on holidays and nobody notified us about it.

I would like to forget the birds which did not manage to escape from the pine trees as they were trapped by the flames, fluttered in the air and then fell like autumn leaves.

I would like to forget the scared faces of my colleagues when we saw the 50m flames surround us.

I would like to forget all those who came in jeeps pulling handbrakes and speeding up only to enjoy the spectacle without helping us, when our nostrils ran with tar and chew ashes when we were trying to escape we couldn't because the curious 4wheel drivers had caused traffic jam.

I would like to forget all those who were sipping coffee and laughed at us at the moment we were giving our souls to put out the fire.

I would like to forget the panic-stricken voices of colleagues on the radio transceivers when the flames surrounded them.

But I will not forget those helicopter pilots who at the last moment opened us a way of escape through the enormous walls of flames.

But I will not forget all governments up to this day who allow land-infringers to build illegally, who face heartlessly the arsons and mock the fire-fighting volunteers.

But I will not forget that four of us with a vehicle managed to stop a fire front of 500m, to save 5 houses and some sheep. It will help me sleep when the horror images turn in my mind.

But I will not forget the pretty stretcher-bearer who supported me when I could not breathe, the experienced doctors who fell on me and gave me a future, as well as the hospital personnel who had excess compassion and goodness.

Thank you all.

ZAKYNTHOS NEWS

The year was marked with an increasingly good cooperation with the National Marine Park. In total we had 1092 nests along the six nesting beaches of Laganas Bay, slightly below the 23-year annual average. On 25 September, with the sponsorship of Johnson Diversey, we presented to teachers and educators of Zakynthos our Environmental Education Programme with the assistance of ARCHELON's mobile exhibition which was set nearby.

PELOPONNESE NEWS

In Kyparissia Bay the volunteer camp was based in Elaia, with the local municipality providing water and electricity. The total nest count of the season reached 667, which makes 2007 a "good" year. Nevertheless, the number of dead turtles increased with most of them without external injuries, possibly attributed to trawlers fishing illegally in shallow waters. Despite a general good cooperation with local communities several instances of human disturbance of turtle nesting were noted, as mechanized beach-cleaning during the nesting season, six nests were destroyed during adjustment of the Neda river mouth (to avoid flooding after the devastating fires), and above all the bright lights at Kalonero. After many years of monitoring all the nesting beaches in Lakonikos Bay (totaling 23 km), the scientific committee of ARCHELON declared the 5-km Mavrovouni beach as an "index" site and restricted monitoring only in this area. During 2007 a total of 29 nests were recorded on Mavrovouni which indicates approximately 190 nests in the entire 23-km area. The information kiosk set up in Mavrovouni was very busy especially with children for whom several activities were organized. This year we also had 4 families of volunteers, testing a novel project of ARCHELON: family volunteering. In Koroni 42 nests were recorded in total. Cooperation with locals seems now well established; shop-owners, fishermen and authorities consider us an indispensable part of the town's "ecological summer activity".

CRETE NEWS

During the nesting season, we tried to ameliorate the infrastructure of the volunteer camps at Rethymno and Chania. In Rethymno the camp was moved at a more difficult terrain but with more permanent installations. However, the strong rainfalls at the end of the project made the life extremely hard to the few remaining volunteers who, despite the negative circumstances, closed heroically the project. In Chania the old camp at Gerani was not used in 2007 and the volunteers stayed at the school in the village of Vrysses, kindly offered to ARCHELON by the local community. In September, a small group of British tourists,

from the educational agency ACE STUDY TOURS, visited the project and participated in post-hatch excavations. The continuing decline of nest numbers on Crete (only 289 nests on all 3 monitored areas), causes a great concern which must be seriously addressed. In December we participated in a meeting of professional and sports fishermen at Rethymno, where some problems of the local fishermen were discussed, among them how to mitigate illegal ways of fishing.

FUNDERS-THANKS



Last Notice!

This is the last issue of Turtle Tracks(TT) to be printed on paper. From the next issue TT will be distributed only electronically. If you wish to be included in our mailing list please send a message to:
stps@archelon.gr

Thank you