

TURTLE TRACKS



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SOFIA RETURNS TO THE SEA

Sofia is an adult female sea turtle, who was found in Messologi lagoon in May 2000, having a severe wound on the head. With the care of local fishermen and the Port Police, Sofia arrived at the Sea Turtle Rescue Centre in Glyfada. Sofia turned into one of the most difficult cases in the Centre. Apart from the treatment for the wound, which developed normally, she also had buoyancy problems. She could not submerge and floated continuously on the surface, which caused feeding difficulties.

In order to cope with the problem, lead weights (sinkers) were glued on her shell. Some months later, it was observed that Sofia had started to submerge. She was soon able to feed herself, by temporarily diving at the bottom of the tank, although she continued to float for the greatest part of the day.

During 2005, she improved further and showed almost normal behavior. Thus it was about time to gradually remove the sinkers and for the first time a discussion, as to when she would be released, started.

Within 4 months Sofia was swimming normally without sinkers, so after some final observations it was decided that she was ready to be released. On 15 November 2005, at Sounio beach, Sofia returned to her natural environment. A satellite transmitter was placed on her shell, so as to be able to monitor her movements. At the time of writing this, Sofia is swimming along the shores of northern Africa.

The news brought great satisfaction to everybody, but especially to the Centre's staff and volunteers as well as to the many Centre's visitors who came to know her well after so many years at the Centre. Sofia was the only turtle staying in the Rescue Centre for so long and for this reason everybody liked her so much. We all wish a safe trip in the Mediterranean Sea, with no more adventures!

Sofia, a sea turtle who remained at the Rescue Centre for 5 years, was released last November.

'05 PROGRAMMES PRESENTATION

On 20 November 2005, ARCHELON organized the traditional annual presentation of its work for the last year.

The particular date had a different meaning for ARCHELON because the 20 November is the day when the statute of the Society was signed, 22 years ago, full of hopes and vision for sea turtle protection and conservation in Greece.

Since then much has been done and every year even more is done so as at the annual presentation of ARCHELON's work many attendees are taken by surprise.

Following a talk on the objectives and the overall work of ARCHELON, several presentations on the main results of the summer projects, which the Society carries out on Zakynthos, Peloponnesus and Crete, also took place.

The summer projects succeeded due to the hard work of all the team, i.e. volunteers, seasonal field leaders, staff and members of the Board.

The most outstanding event of last year took place at the 25th International Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation in Savannah (USA), where Dimitris Margaritoulis was elected President for the International Sea Turtle Society and subsequently for the next International Symposium, to be held in Greece, in April 2006.

In the context of LIFE Nature project aiming at the reduction of mortality of sea turtles, the new leaflet of "Life Network" was issued and a new campaign for the promotion of the national Sea Turtle Stranding Network began. In the context of the same project, two First Aid Stations were founded. The First Aid Station in Amvrakikos Bay was founded in February 2005. Amvrakikos Bay is definitely an important sea turtle foraging and wintering area. Furthermore, in July 2005, a First Aid and Environmental Station was inaugurated in Pagalohori, in the Municipality of Arkadi in Crete, a village close to one of the most important nesting beaches in Crete.

In May 2005, the Volunteer Training Centre was inaugurated in the Sea Turtle Rescue Centre at Glyfada, which will play an active role in establishing and promoting volunteer spirit in Greece and at the same time training

young volunteers for the protection of the environment. Furthermore, the construction works to improve the operation of the Rescue Centre were finalized and now it operates not only as a sea turtle hospital but also as an environmental education centre, while an adequate visitor's reception area is provided.

In September 2005, ARCHELON signed a special agreement of cooperation with the Management Agency of the National Marine Park of Zakynthos.

Moreover, the results of the reproductive activity of sea turtles were announced and they were quite low this year (on Zakynthos 833 nests, in Peloponnisos 576 nests, on Crete 249 nests). However, we hope that this low numbers are only a temporary pattern, caused by general environmental factors, as a similar low reproductive activity was observed in many other nesting beaches in the eastern Mediterranean.

On the contrary, the public awareness programme exhibited a great increase in the number of people informed at ARCHELON's information stations, during presentations in hotels and on the beaches during field work. It is estimated that in total about 160,000 people were informed last year.

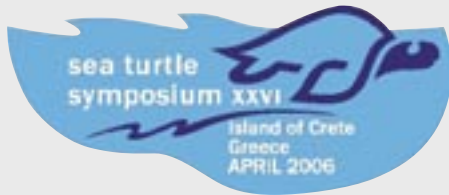
At the same time, children's attendance at ARCHELON's education programmes was quite high. Around 140 presentations took place at the Rescue Centre, on Crete and on Zakynthos with 8,000 children and teachers informed. This number does not include the number of persons informed through the portable education kits of ARCHELON.

The event was closed with enthusiasm and hope for the continuation of the efforts for a balanced environment which will allow people and animals to live together.

Alan Rees in the programmes presentation talking about Syria programme



THE 26th INTERNATIONAL SEA TURTLE SYMPOSIUM PRESCRIBES A GREAT SUCCESS



The global participation at the 26th International Sea Turtle Symposium (Aghia Pelaghia, Crete, 3-8 April 2006) presents astonishing success. 540 abstracts were submitted! This number of abstracts is the highest among all the former Symposiums. Furthermore, at the end of 2005 the registrations were at the level of the 700 persons. It is estimated that the final number of the participants is going to top the 800. The personnel and researchers of ARCHELON submitted 9 abstracts presenting the scientific work that takes place at the Sea Turtle Rescue Centre at Glyfada, at Zakynthos, Kyparissia Bay and Crete as well as at sea with the cooperation of fishermen as that regards the LIFE Nature programme.

The Symposium agenda so far is tailored as follows:

- 3-4 April:** Mediterranean Reunion (includes several presentations and discussions).
- 5-7 April:** Official opening and main programme with oral and poster presentations.
- 8 April:** Annual meeting of the Marine Turtle Specialists Group (MTSG) of the World Conservation Union (IUCN), and a special session about freshwater turtles and tortoises (with emphasis at the eastern Mediterranean).

ARCHELON, being the host organization of the Symposium, provides personnel, volunteers, and equipment for the success of this unique event that takes place for first time in the Mediterranean. Also, ARCHELON in an organized effort tries to collect sponsorships for the Symposium. The Hellenic Ministry for the Environment, the UNEP/MAP, the Hellenic Centre for Marine Research, the INFOTE, the 3E Company, the Public Power Corporation, and others have already expressed an interest. At this point we ought to thank in particular Mrs. Miranta Sklaveniti for her substantial donation to ARCHELON for its needs in organizing the Symposium.

Nesting Beaches 05



Turtles have "good years" and "bad years" when it comes to the number of nests made in different seasons. When I started as a volunteer for ARCHELON in 1994 and became a field leader in 1995, Greek nesting beaches were being overrun with turtles with record numbers of nests registered on all seven of ARCHELON's monitored areas. Since then there have been fluctuations, not cycles, between years with many nests and others with less.

Because turtles are long-lived, do not nest every year and do not even stick to the same number of years between nesting seasons, it is not possible to identify population trends from only one or two years' worth of data and this is why ARCHELON's permanence, with some of our projects entering their 23rd year of operation in 2006, is so vital to better understand and protect the Greek turtles. Recent analysis of 15 years data showed that the nesting population at Rethymno on Crete is facing severe problems and has an apparently real downward trend in nesting levels not observed in the other major nesting areas. This is cause for concern; however, we hope the conservation measures we are undertaking there, year-upon-year, will stop this decline and the resulting increased production will bring this population from decline to recovery.

Although, fluctuations in nest numbers are natural and to be expected, it was still a shock to record, in 2005 a very low year for Greek turtles. Nesting levels in separate areas generally follow each other to some degree and this was very much evident in 2005, as for ARCHELON's seven nesting beach projects recorded the lowest nesting since their initiations. Even at Zakynthos, the Mediterranean's largest loggerhead nesting population was not immune to this effect and recorded its lowest levels recorded, with less than 850 nests on beaches that have, in the peak year, held over 2000.

I hope and believe that this phenomenon from 2005 is just an extreme example of turtles' overlapping "off" nesting seasons and that in the coming year ARCHELON will be able to record a bumper season with many nests in all areas. Whatever the case, we can be sure that ARCHELON will be there to systematically record and publicise the status of Greece's turtles for the years to come.

Alan Rees

ZAKYNTHOS NEWS

ARCHELON together with Johnson Diversey organized an event for the celebration of the Society's 22nd birthday in Zakynthos.

The event took place on 8 September 2005 with the sponsorship of Louis Hotel. Among others, many representatives of local authorities attended the presentation, which included information about ARCHELON's work.

PELOPONNESE NEWS

From 3 October to 8 November 2005, eight students made practicum in ARCHELON's Environmental Station at Kyparissia Bay. They worked in the context of the Programme "Inspectors, Wardens and Guides of Natural Environment", and they collected information about ARCHELON's projects, concerning the study and conservation of sea turtles in Kyparissia Bay.

Furthermore, ARCHELON's mobile exhibition, which operates in the context of LIFE Nature project, traveled to Killini (western Peloponnesus) from 20 to 23 October and was mounted in the Olympia Riviera Hotel.

At the same period, on 21 October, 55 pupils from Turkey and Greece, members of "International Bacalorea" programme, visited ARCHELON's Environmental Station in Kyparissia Bay.

CRETE NEWS

Many of the nesting beaches on Crete (Rethymno, Chania, Messara Bay) are under intense development to the extent that sea turtles and nests are gradually replaced by sun beds and umbrellas.

A further problem, despite the imprudent tourist development along the nesting beaches, is the existence of artificial lighting which discourages nesting and also disorients hatchlings which eventually become dehydrated and die without ever being able to reach the sea.

The Pyrgos beach at Psilonero in Chania is an example of a nesting beach, which is still natural and requires

attention so that it is preserved in the future. The Municipality of Platania, with a jurisdiction on this beach, has realized the importance of the specific beach and strives to promote its preservation. In the context of this effort, the Municipality replaced the conventional lightings with sodium lightings, which are "friendly" to sea turtles, preventing them from hindering and disorientation.

This is a very important step, as it is the first town in Greece to change its road lights for sea turtles' sake.

The changing of the conventional lights was accompanied by a visit of the primary school of the nearby Gerani village.

FUNDERS-THANKS



For conservation activities in Killini.



For publishing ARCHELON's Colourbook and sponsoring turtles' transmitters.



For financial support.



For sponsoring a turtle transmitter.



For providing free camping space.

Mrs Miranda Sklaveniti for financial support.

The illustrators Mr Vasilis Svetlin and Niko Maroulaki for offering their drawings to ARCHELON.

The family of Noel & Claire Perry for financial support.

Want to become a volunteer?

Now is the time to apply for volunteer work
Apply by visiting ARCHELON website:
<http://www.archelon.gr>

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