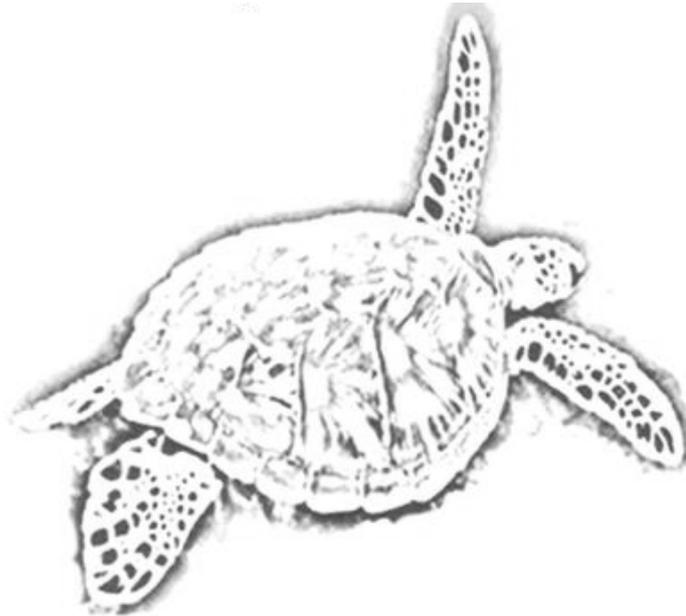


# **PROCEEDINGS OF THE SECOND MEDITERRANEAN CONFERENCE ON MARINE TURTLES**

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## **NETWORKING AMONG RESCUE CENTRES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

ARCHELON established its Sea Turtle Rescue Centre in 1994 in co-operation with the Municipality of Glyfada, Athens. Its aims include the rehabilitation of turtles reported injured in Greece, as well as environmental education activities. Over 400 sea turtles have been treated at the Rescue Centre over the last ten years, 60% of which have been released back to their natural environment (Kopsida et al. 2002). There are currently several other rehabilitation facilities for sea turtles operating in the Mediterranean, in Italy, Spain, Croatia and Israel, while organisations or institutions in other countries intend to establish new ones.

The causes of injuries for the majority of sea turtles admitted in all Mediterranean Rescue Centres are similar and are usually the result of their accidental capture in fishing gear (UNEP RAC/SPA 1999). These include deliberate injuries inflicted on the head and/or the carapace, ingestion of fishing lines and hooks, and damages caused by entanglement to nets or fishing lines. Additionally, the Mediterranean region is a “closed” sea with apparently genetically isolated sea turtle populations (Bowen et al. 1992, Bowen et al. 1993, Laurent et al. 1993).

Yet there has been limited communication and interaction among Rescue Centres. As a result, experience acquired in each Rescue Centre is rarely made available to other rehabilitation facilities to improve treatment techniques and methods, efficiency of Stranding Networks, administration, infrastructure, etc. More importantly, each new facility has to “re-invent the wheel” for practically all aspects of their operation. This presentation will be analyzing the benefits of networking among the Mediterranean Rescue Centres and present the progress made so far in that direction.

### **DISCUSSION**

A Network of Mediterranean Rescue Centres would be an ideal forum for exchange of information on rehabilitation methods and practices, protocols, organisation of stranding networks, administration, infrastructure, etc. Additionally the Network would be in a position to facilitate exchange and training of volunteers and personnel, as well as transportation of sea turtles to other facilities better equipped or more experienced in the particular type of injuries/ailments. Finally, the Network would provide comparable databases on the interaction of sea turtles with fisheries for the entire Mediterranean region, using stranding results and statistics and sea turtles admitted to the rehabilitation facilities. This information can then be disseminated to the public, the scientific community and decision makers and used for lobbying for the implementation of conservation measures across the region.

Co-operation of Mediterranean Rescue Centres in the context of a Network would have several benefits for the long term as well as the short term sea turtle conservation the region.

These include:

1. The quality of turtle rehabilitation can be significantly improved throughout the region by (a) increasing the percentage of turtles rehabilitated and (b) reducing the average time turtles spend under treatment.
2. Standardised and comparable databases and information can contribute to creating an even more accurate picture on the issue of the interaction of sea turtles with fisheries, as well as valuable information on the biology and behaviour of sea turtles at sea (e.g. foraging areas, migration patterns, etc.). As a result, conservation efforts in the region can be constantly re-adapted, optimising their efficiency for the protection of the species.
3. The Network can play a supportive role for Rescue Centres that will be established in the future, by providing experience, training, practical advice, etc. Combined with the available literature and guidelines the Rescue Centre can reach its full potential in less time.

### **THE MEDITERRANEAN WORKSHOP ON THE REHABILITATION OF INJURED SEA TURTLES**

ARCHELON organised on 19-21 November, 2004 a Mediterranean Workshop on the Rehabilitation of Injured Sea Turtles. The Workshop was organized in co-operation with the Municipality of Glyfada in the context of a LIFE-NATURE Project co-funded by the European Commission aiming to reduce mortality of turtles at sea. Over 30 participants attended the workshop, including representatives from the MTSG and UNEP's RAC/SPA. Other participants included experts from various Mediterranean rehabilitation facilities (WWF Italy, Fondazione Cetacea ONLUS, CTS – Ambiente "Mediterranean Gate" Rescue Centre, Ceuta and CRAM, Pula Aquarium, Israeli Rescue Centre, ARCHELON's Rescue Centre, the Veterinary Department of Thessaloniki, and the Hydrobiological Station of Rhodes) and observers from DHKD, University of Pammukale, MEDASSET.

The aim of the workshop was to bring in contact sea turtle experts from the region in order to exchange experiences and expertise so that rehabilitation practices and the efficiency of stranding networks can be improved. Another important aim of the workshop was to explore the possibilities that rescue centres may provide for sea turtle conservation in the Mediterranean as well as the idea of creating a Network among Rehabilitation facilities.

The need for better communication and the opportunities that a Network of Mediterranean Rescue Centres can provide for sea turtles conservation in the region became apparent very early on in the discussion. Although everyone was in favour of networking among Mediterranean Rescue Centres, it was agreed as a first step that they should communicate electronically, without using a special listserv. The creation of a special webpage for communication was decided to be the best option.

The webpage will be hosted on a website not affiliated with any specific country or organisation (e.g. seaturtle.org, MTSG, etc.) and it will have a public and a password-restricted section for more "confidential" discussions. It will contain profiles of all the existing rescue centres and first aid stations in the Mediterranean. Vasilis Kouroutos of MEDASSET, Greece volunteered to be the webmaster of the page. The group also appointed an editing team: Flegra Bentivegna (Naples Aquarium), Paolo Casale (WWF Italy), Alvaro De Los Rios y Loshuertos

("Mediterranean Gate" Rescue Centre, Ceuta), Atef Ouerghi (RAC/SPA) and Alan Rees (Co-ordinator, ARCHELON).

The editing team are in the process of preparing Mediterranean Sea turtle rescue centre profiles to be included in the public section of the website. At the same time lists of publications concerning turtle rehabilitation matters are being compiled for inclusion at the webpage which is in the final stages of designing.

## **CONCLUSION**

ARCHELON's Mediterranean Workshop on the Rehabilitation of injured sea turtles provided the perfect opportunity to explore the benefits and the possibilities of creating a Network of Rescue Centres operating in the region. Since there was consensus from the participants concerning its benefits for sea turtle conservation in the region, the first steps and decisions for its creation were taken. Hopefully, within the next few years, the results of this regional co-operation will begin to have an effect on the long-term protection of sea turtles.

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5. Special thanks are due to the organisers and the Programme Committee of the 2nd Mediterranean Conference on Marine Turtles held in Kemer, Turkey 4-8 May 2005.

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