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**DISCOVERY OF A MAJOR NEW NESTING AREA IN SYRIA FOR THE CRITICALLY  
ENDANGERED MEDITERRANEAN GREEN TURTLE**

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Green turtle nesting in the Mediterranean is confined to the Eastern Basin with most nesting occurring in Turkey and Cyprus. Lower nesting levels have been recorded across the rest of the Levant coast (Kasperek et al, 2001). The Mediterranean population has recently been classified as critically endangered in the IUCN Red Lists (ERASG, 1996). Syria's 183km coastline was briefly surveyed in 1991 and limited nesting (attributed to loggerheads) was found on 2 beaches at Lattakia and between Tartous and Lebanon

(Kasperek, 1995). No follow-up surveys were subsequently carried out to better quantify nesting levels.

In 2004, a two-month survey of the 12.5km beach south of Lattakia (35.440°N 35.895°E), that was shown to have most turtle tracks by Kasperek (1995), was undertaken to confirm nesting levels, species responsible and train local workers in conservation methods. The beach was patrolled daily on foot to record turtle nesting and hatching activity and factors

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impacting nest survivorship. Nests and suspected nests were marked with labeled stones or sticks.

To estimate total number of nests on Lattakia beach, we added the number of nests observed during the surveying period to the number of unmarked nests (made prior to the surveys) that were discovered through hatching or depredation. The conservative estimates of nest numbers were calculated to be 104 green and 6 loggerhead nests. The main threats to nests identified were predation of eggs and hatchlings by foxes, dogs and ghost crabs, disorientation of hatchlings by artificial lights, vehicular use of the beach and nest inundation from storm waves. A recent review of green turtle nesting in the Mediterranean (Kasperek et al, 2001) classified beaches with over 100 nests per season as nesting areas of major

importance. The 104 green turtle nests at Lattakia rates the beach in this category and in the top ten nesting beaches of the Mediterranean. Thus, Syria hosts one of the most important nesting populations in the region, worthy of extensive conservation activity.

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