

# Marine Turtle Newsletter

## Successes and Failures: Conservation and Tourism on the Nesting Beaches of Laganas Bay, Zakynthos, Greece, 1989

**Dimitris Margaritoulis**

*Project Coordinator, Sea Turtle Protection Society, P.O. Box 51154, GR-145 10 Kifissia, Greece*

**Marathonissi:** This has been by far the best year [for turtles] on the island of Marathonissi; there were hardly any visitors compared to previous years. This is partially due to a posted day-guard, the regular presence of the Sea Turtle Protection Society (STPS), and the efforts of the Port Police. Problems with lights from the residential areas of Laganas, Kalamaki, and Keri, and sound pollution from the disco on the islet of Agios Sostis, still exist.

**East Laganas:** This 2 km stretch of sand extends from Zante Beach Hotel to the cliffs of Hipsolithos and is divided into three sectors (A, B, C). *Sector A:* This sector extends from Zante Beach Hotel to 200 m before Kalamaki Beach Hotel, and a very good situation exists here. During the day there are no umbrellas and no sun-chairs, beach users possess a high degree of awareness, and there is a satisfactory implementation of protection measures due to a joint effort by the STPS and the Port Police to safeguard the coastal entrance to the protected beach. A few ambitious onlookers try to sneak in at night, but all are denied access. In 1985 and 1986, >100 persons in one hour attempted to trespass! During the last two years (1988-1989) the number has dwindled to 1-10 persons per night. This great progress is a result of the STPS Awareness Programme carried out through the Information Station at West Laganas and the slide/film shows at hotels (at least 2 per week), coupled with information signs set up by the Prefecture, the Port Police Substation, the "look-out stand", the natural hatchery (in existence for the last three years) and, very importantly, the presence of the STPS team. Lights from Laganas, Kalanaki, and Lithakia, noise and lights from the disco on Agios Sostis, and frequent air-traffic (15 flights per week) to and from the adjacent airport constitute a noticeable threat. *Sectors B, C:* Things are not looking good in these two sectors; this is due to increasing tourist activities and our inability to establish an Information Station here. During the day there are more than the legal number of umbrellas on the beach and the four accesses to the sea host a number of cars which at night shine their headlights on the sandy stretches. The wardens employed by the community of Kalamaki safeguard three of the four accesses, but could be more conscientious. Traffic bars have been placed on ineffective spots and Prefecture's signs have been destroyed. It is a common practice to meet "curious" tourists on the beach at night, which makes work harder for the researchers. Lights from the residential areas are visible in these two sectors, but the car lights constitute by far the most important hazard. High nesting density is observed in areas hosting the legal umbrellas and beach chairs; many times turtles attempt to lay eggs amongst the umbrellas and sun-decks, some successfully and others not. Virtually all these nests are transferred to the natural hatchery or other safe areas further up the beach.

**Kalamaki:** The legal umbrellas occupy 2/5ths of the total area, not to mention the ones pitched in the sand during the day. The warden employed by the Kalamaki community could be more efficient in his duties. The lights from "Crystal Beach" hotel, the inappropriate positioning of the traffic-bar, and the noisy and illuminated disco on the foothills of Skopos range are general problems for the turtles. Indeed, the turtles are "pushed" to the west end of Kalamaki beach, which is not optimum for nesting, in order to avoid disturbance.

**Sekania:** Very few day visitors (<10) and no disturbance at night. On 22 August 1989 a bush fire burnt the scrub to the sand. Winter rainfall will likely (due to soil erosion) alter the consistency of the sand.

**Daphni:** This year there has been a considerable increase in visitation due to the improvement of the dirt road and the operation of a *taverna* open during the day. In August, approximately 50 vehicles per day drove to the beach. Twenty umbrellas were permanently pitched on the waterfront. Tourists evacuated the beach before sunset, but almost any conservation effort with beach users was out of the question because of local land-owners' adverse reaction.

**Gerakas:** Half the beach is occupied by some 50 umbrellas, 100 sun-beds and a number of *pedaloës* arranged in 1-2 rows running parallel to the shoreline. All of these are illegal. All visitors are informed by the STPS Information Station, but due to the precarious relationship between the illegal umbrella owners and the STPS, it is often difficult (if not impossible) to carry out the Awareness Programme. It is not unusual for Greek tourists to enter into arguments with the illegal beach-exploiters because the latter refuse to comply with existing legislation. The STPS had to discontinue the Awareness Programme from 9-21 August 1989 due to intense friction and some violence on behalf of the umbrella

owners and a number of local inhabitants. As of 11 August 1989, by order of the General Secretary of Ministry of the Environment, the sun-beds were gathered in one heap at the very top end of the beach. However, this has not helped sea turtle nesting because the sun-beds are dragged across the sand, causing damage to incubating eggs. The night guarding is carried out by STPS because the community of Vassilikos has refused to employ an official warden. For the last two years no human presence has been reported on the beach at night. In August 1989 about 1,000 persons per day visited the beach Gerakas. Nests made on "busy" spots were transferred to safer grounds.