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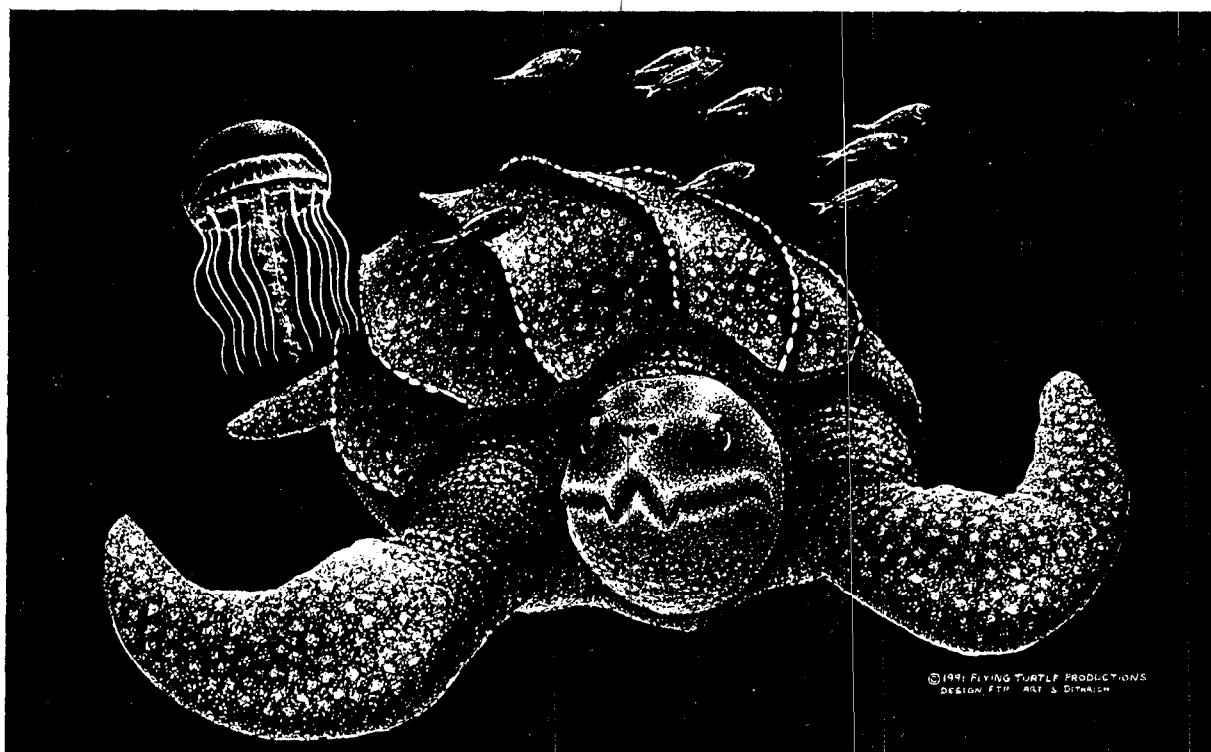
PROCEEDINGS OF THE ELEVENTH ANNUAL WORKSHOP  
ON SEA TURTLE BIOLOGY AND CONSERVATION



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## ZAKYNTHOS 1990: STILL TRYING TO LIVE TOGETHER

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Zakynthos, a small island (40 x 600 ha) lying 17 km from the west coast of Peloponnesus, has proved to be the most important nesting area for the marine turtle *Caretta caretta* in the Mediterranean. The rookery, comprised of 3.5 km of sandy coastline within the Bay of Laganas and divided in six separate beaches, hosts from 850 to 2000 nests/season, depending on the season. Of the six beaches, Sekania (0.35 km long) contributes more than 50% to the total nesting capacity (see Figure 1 from Margaritoulis, 1988).

Sea turtles are protected by law in Greece, which in 1983 also ratified the Bern Convention. Legislation has been in effect since 1983, imposing building restrictions on an area adjacent to the nesting beaches. Maritime measures were introduced in 1988 to regulate speedboat and fishing activities in the Bay.

Zakynthos, once a quiet island catering mostly for a small number of Greek visitors has, in the recent years, turned into a prime tourist resort. In 1990, it experienced a 30% increase when at the same time neighbouring resorts with a long tradition in tourism were well into a recession. From the beginning of May through the end of September, 1,047 chartered flights, mainly from the U.K., Germany and Austria, flew in 142,000 foreign visitors, which is four times the permanent population of the island. The high nesting density of the rookery and the ever growing tourist influx, dictated the need for an intensive campaign to protect both the turtles and the nesting grounds.

In 1987, the Sea Turtle Protection Society of Greece (STPS) which has been carrying out a monitoring/tagging project since 1983, initiated with financial assistance from the EEC, WWF and others a Public Awareness Programme, conducted mainly through information stations on the beaches, slide shows at hotels, daytime beach patrols and night time guarding of beach accesses.

In the years that followed, inadequate enforcement of existing legislation coupled with the incompetence of the Greek authorities to deliver a compensation scheme, engendered the indignation of the affected landowners, who view the tourist industry as an easy and lucrative enterprise.

During the 1990 summer programmes, the despair and fury of these landowners culminated in violence and physical assaults against STPS volunteers. Nevertheless, the STPS and a contingent of over 130 volunteers from Greece, U.K., USA, Italy, Brazil, Germany, etc., successfully completed the programme in close cooperation with the "Zakynthian Ecological Movement" and other concerned individuals from the island. The main Information Station at Laganas became the focal point for over 30,000 tourists. Seven thousand signatures were collected on a petition urging the authorities to save the turtles and ninety slide presentations were organized at hotels.

After four years the Public Awareness Programme succeeded in:

a. Minimizing the number of tourists attempting to visit the beaches at night. This is demonstrated in the westernmost sector of the East Laganas beach which borders with the tourist resort of Laganas. Since 1989, a rise in the nesting activity was recorded and in 1990 the increase reached 18% compared to 1988 (Fig. 2).

b. Sensitizing the majority of the local inhabitants. Thirty Zakynthians participated in the programme.

c. Increasing national and international lobbying and exerting pressure on the authorities to speed up the procedure for the preparation of a Management Plan.

It is obvious that in order to secure full protection it is necessary to acquire a core area and compensate landowners for the land they cannot utilize. To this end, it is imperative to proceed immediately with the acquisition of Sekania, probably the most densely nested beach in the world for the loggerhead turtle (up to 3,000 nests/km).

The completion of a Management Plan is required in order to determine land use in the protected area and set the foundations for a Marine Park.

It is also necessary to maintain a broad buffer zone which will allow for a soft development and funds generated by the Marine Park will be used to offer affected landowners a steady income.

#### **LITERATURE CITED**

Margaritoulis, D. (1988). Nesting activity of the loggerhead turtle on Zakynthos island during 1986 and 1987 nesting seasons. Unpublished Report for the Ministry of the Environment, Athens.

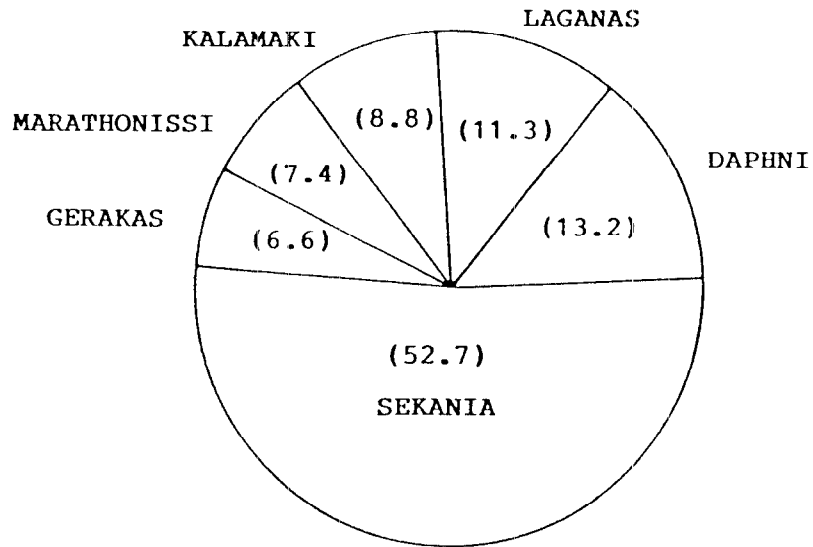


Fig.1. Distribution of nesting on Zakynthos nesting beaches as a percentage of the total number of nests per season. Values represent means over six nesting seasons (1984-1989)

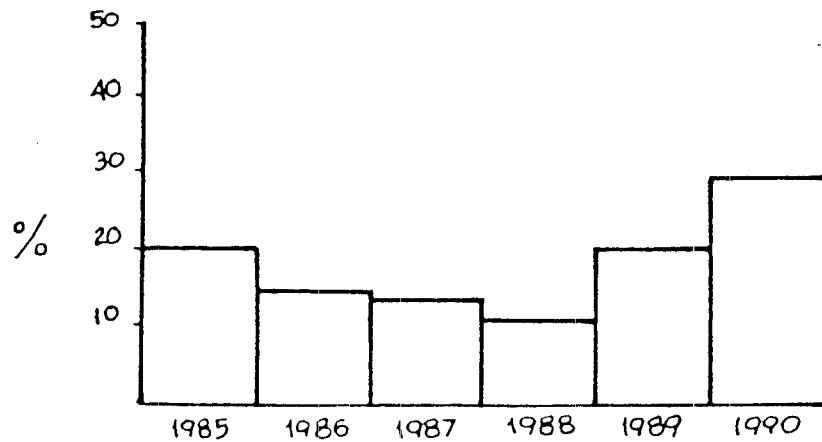


Fig.2. Evolution of nesting activity over six nesting seasons (1985-1990) on sector A of the East Laganas beach.