



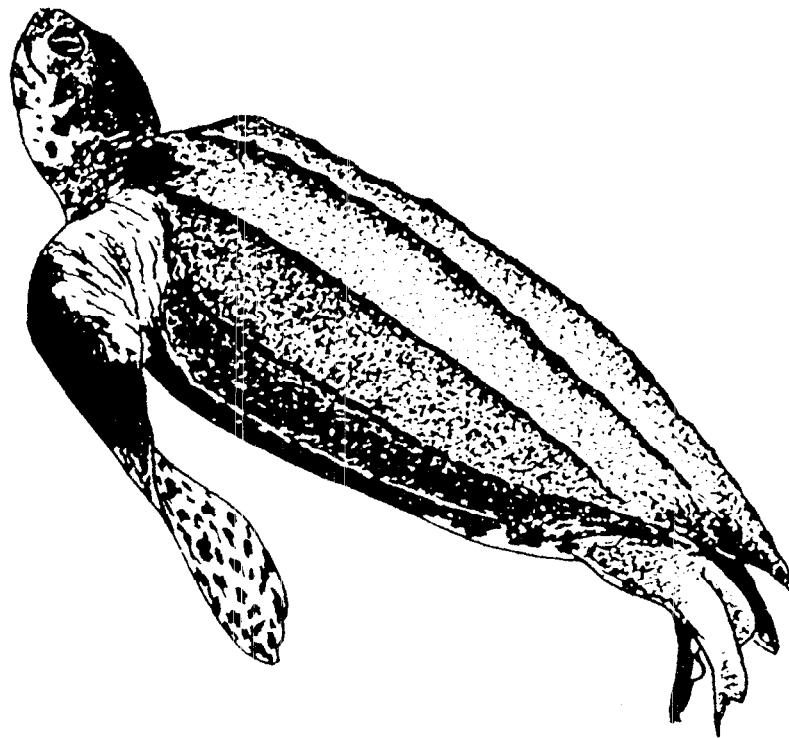
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**PROCEEDINGS OF THE FIFTEENTH ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM ON
SEA TURTLE BIOLOGY AND CONSERVATION**

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FROM THE BEACH TO THE CLASSROOM: AN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM IN GREECE

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INTRODUCTION

Compared to other European countries, Greece has an incredible variety of flora, fauna and geomorphology. This diversity is contained within a small area, which also houses some of Europe's last wilderness. Our civilization is strictly connected with this nature. The ideas of "human duty" and "justice", as described in the ancient greek drama, have their source in the natural laws and should dominate again the relationship between Man and Nature.

The Sea Turtle Protection Society of Greece (STPS) has been carrying out research work on sea turtles for more than 12 years. All this knowledge would have been sterile had we not tried to convey it to other people and especially to children. We believe that, conservationists' most important tool in promoting nature protection is public awareness, and its most promising investment is environmental education.

We started the environmental education program in 1985, after consulting special-ists in pedagogy and child psychology (Kremezi-Margaritouli, 1992). The participants are all volunteers that have worked on sea turtle field projects. The environmental education program has evolved greatly since then and each year improvements and expansions are made. The aim is to try and help young people to live in harmony with nature, using it as a source of experience, pleasure and happiness.

STIMULATION

Stimulation is the summary of material, knowledge and persons to perform an environmental education activity.

Stimulation consists of the following:

- Our detailed knowledge about sea turtles. The fact that our efforts focus only on sea turtles makes our force stronger because it is concentrated on a single target.
- Charismatic researchers are selected to conduct environmental education activities.
- High-quality audiovisual material, combined well with few simple and specific comments for each picture.

After some years of work and having faced a big demand from schools, which we couldn't handle, we created in 1990 the "Turtle Briefcase". This is a portable educational display aimed at 4 different age groups with instructions for the teacher. The "Turtle Briefcase" contains 8 different items and was the first portable environmental education program in Greece. School administrations can borrow it, perform the presentation and return it to the Society free of any charges.

APPROACH

Approach is the way we use the stimulation in order to raise awareness among pupils. The approach we follow consists of:

- Formal co-operation with the Ministry of Education, which is the competent authority to inform schools about our program.
- Friendly behavior from us to pupils and educators, based on the idea of equality.
- Presentations at schools, both "live" and through the "Turtle Briefcase". Presentations follow standard rules which have been set after research, consultation and experience. For example, for 11 to 15 year old pupils, a presentation is divided into:
 - a) Organized kinetic games to get to know each other and create a friendly atmosphere for better communication (approx. 10 min).
 - b) A slide show on the functions of nature, and another one or video on sea turtle biology and conservation efforts (about 30 min).
 - c) Questions, opinions, discussion (15-20 min).
 - d) Offering STPS publications to the school communities and calling for further communication and contact in order to establish various follow-up activities.
 - e) Optional painting of a poster or other art work (approx. 45 min).
- Exhibitions of children's art work. Two exhibitions have been organized by us, entitled "A Picture is 1,000 Words".
- A 4-day environmental and cultural excursion in Attica is offered every year to pupils and teachers from the island of Zakynthos. Zakynthos hosts the most condensed sea turtle nesting area in the Mediterranean, but also faces a strong negative reaction against turtle conservation from a portion of its inhabitants.
- A permanent exhibition is under construction at the Sea Turtle Rescue Center at Glyfada, near Athens. The exhibition is housed in a train wagon and is being prepared by STPS volunteers. A small wooden amphitheater facing the sea for open air activities will be also constructed.

RESULTS

The results so far have been as follows:

- Nearly 1,500 presentations, either "live" or through the "Turtle Briefcase", have been conducted at schools throughout Greece. The total number of pupils that have attended the presentations is estimated at 100,000.
- Caretta caretta is the most widely known endangered animal in Greece and is used as a symbol for wild nature conservation. It is mentioned quite often in media, reviews and even cartoons.
- The attitude of the teachers has changed enormously since 1985. While the first presentations were met with some suspicion, now they are widely accepted and there is even a degree of admiration. There is a long waiting list for schools wishing to visit the exhibition of the Sea Turtle Rescue Centre, which has not yet opened to the public.
- The "Turtle Briefcase" has been used as a model for similar briefcases on other subjects such as: recycling rubbish, protecting brown bears, etc.
- In order to expand the educational program beyond the sea turtle issue, the STPS has created another briefcase: "Life on the Coast". The creation of this briefcase was stimulated by the results of a 3 year project aimed at identifying new sea turtles rookeries in Greece. This project provided the opportunity to collect a great deal of material on the Greek coasts. The experience acquired from the "Turtle Briefcase" has also been taken into account.

EPILOGUE

- The majority of people do not destroy nature in purpose, but because they are not properly informed. They think that their interests lie far from nature.
- We try to make children understand that sheer exploitation is the lowest level of relationship between Man and Nature.

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