

First Record of a Leatherback Turtle in Syria

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Three species of marine turtle, namely the loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*), green (*Chelonia mydas*) and leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*), regularly occur in the Mediterranean. The loggerhead and green turtles have established nesting colonies mainly in Greece, Cyprus and Turkey (see reviews by Margaritoulis *et al.* (2003) and Kasperek *et al.* (2001) for nesting distribution of loggerhead and green turtles, respectively). The leatherback is rarer and is a migrant from the Atlantic. It has no known or expected nesting sites in the Mediterranean.

A recent review of the occurrence of the leatherback turtle in the Mediterranean reported over 400 observations covering the entire range of the sea with none coming from Syria (Casale *et al.* 2003). This note, therefore, presents the first record of a leatherback turtle in Syrian waters.

The leatherback's front left flipper had become entangled in the ropes of a trammel net, on the 4th of August 2004 at about 2.5km offshore from Jableh town. The turtle was hauled on board the ship, taken to the port, photographed by its captors and returned to the sea alive.

The specimen was measured by locals to have a curved carapace length of approximately 140cm and no secondary elongation of the tail was evident. Eckert (2002) considered leatherbacks of less than 145cm curved carapace length to be juveniles and thus this individual is believed to be a large juvenile, possibly female due to the shortness of the tail at this near adult size. Photographs of the turtle can be viewed in the Image Library of seaturtle.org (<http://www.seaturtle.org/cgi-bin/imagelib/index.pl/?photo=1255> and <http://www.seaturtle.org/cgi-bin/imagelib/index.pl/?photo=1256>).

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This observation adds yet another record of incidental capture of a leatherback in the Mediterranean associated with entanglement in nets and ropes rather than through ingestion of hooks.

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MEETING REPORTS

The International Sea Turtle Society Celebrates its First Annual Planning Retreat in Shepherdstown, West Virginia USA (August 16-19, 2004)

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Perhaps you didn't know it, but if you attended the 24th Sea Turtle Symposium in Costa Rica in February-March, 2004, or if you have already registered for the 25th Symposium in Savannah, Georgia then congratulations! You are a member in good standing of the International Sea Turtle Society (ISTS). The Annual Sea Turtle Symposium has been taking place for the past quarter century, of course, long before an ISTS existed. For many years it was simply organized and run on the personal commitment and elbow grease of a few hard working pioneers to whom we are all grateful for their vision and indefatigability. However, 10 years ago, the Symposium grew to a point where incorporation was necessary in order to manage funds and receive grants, and more recently in

2001, the name and by-laws of that original non-profit corporation were altered to make us the International Sea Turtle Society, with the intent of adding an even greater level of professional stature to our organization, and provide an even stronger commitment to our membership.

Today, we have a 13-member Board of Directors (BOD), and an annually rotating President. The ISTS BOD has typically gathered once/year at the Symposium to conduct our corporate business, but in recent years we have discovered that a single meeting is insufficient for appropriately addressing all the issues that now confront us as an institution that plans, finances and executes what has become an enormous annual gathering of more than 1000