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AMVRAKIKOS BAY: AN IMPORTANT FORAGING AREA FOR LOGGERHEAD TURTLES IN GREECE

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A radio and satellite telemetry study on turtles in Amvrakikos Bay was undertaken by ARCHELON in 2002-2003 (Rees & Margaritoulis in press). Subsequently, a long-term programme was started to obtain further data on the turtle population, implemented within the context of the LIFE project: "Reduction of mortality of *Caretta caretta* in Greek seas". The tagging programme comprised 10 and 18 days of fieldwork between May and September during 2004 and 2005, respectively. Each fieldtrip lasted approximately one week. Turtles were caught using a rodeo technique in the shallow waters of the north-eastern part of the Bay. Carapace (straight carapace length notch to tip [SCLn-t; Bolten, 1999]) and tail measurements (Dorsal tail length from the anterior part of the inter-supracaudal notch to the tail tip [TLC; Limpus & Limpus 2003]) were recorded with other biometric data. Turtles were double tagged with a plastic and a metal tag and photographed. Results provided evidence of an important, foraging population of large sub-adult to adult size loggerheads utilizing the bay, with 128 individuals identified in two years (mean SCLn-t=69.0cm, SD=7.7, range=47.1-91.5cm, N=127). Sex ratio, determined from tail length (adapted from Limpus & Limpus 2003), was biased towards males in adult-sized individuals (≥ 69 cm SCLn-t), accounting for 38 (61.3%) of the 62 adult-sized turtles. Only 4 (6.5%) individuals were confirmed as female, having previously been tagged after nesting during other ARCHELON projects. These previously tagged turtles link Amvrakikos Bay to Greece's three major nesting areas. The final 20 turtles could not be positively sexed using external morphological features. Amvrakikos Bay hosts a large artisanal fishery which may impact the turtle population. Indeed, 3 turtles (2.3%) were entangled in, or had ingested, fishing line, 4 turtles (3.1%) were missing part or all of one flipper and 10 turtles (7.8%) exhibited significant impact-induced carapace damage. To promote the protection and rescue of injured turtles, ARCHELON has established a turtle First Aid Station at one of the key ports in the Bay.

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