

***Trionyx triunguis*: The brackish water turtle that also lives in the Mediterranean Sea**

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The Mediterranean subpopulation of the Nile soft-shelled turtle, (*Trionyx triunguis*), is listed by IUCN as critically endangered and classified as 'severely fragmented. It is confined mostly to lower courses of rivers and brackish wetlands. However, there are many records of *Trionyx* in the open sea. This suggests it spends part of its life cycle there, possibly for range expansion or population exchange. Its ability to tolerate salt water has enabled the initially African species to colonise the southeastern Mediterranean. This sub-population may represent a different ecotype that is geographically isolated from the main distribution area.

Due to the lack of in-depth studies as well as their secretive nature coupled, it is hard to estimate population size. However, it is believed that the entire Mediterranean population comprises less than 1,000 adults.

Turkey and Israel are the only country with strong populations. In the lower Nile area, a MEDASSET survey of fishermen conducted in 2002 suggested the species had not been recorded for over 20 years and was believed to be extinct in Egypt. Recently, isolated sightings have been reported in Greece, Lebanon and Syria.

In 1993, heavy flooding in Israel destroyed most of a large population at Nahal Alexander and it took several years for the Mediterranean population to recover. The species has been introduced into the inland Hula Reserve with individuals transferred from the Mediterranean population, where it could potentially establish a significant population.

MEDASSET's research in Turkey since 1997 shows that the Çukurova and Dalaman deltas have the only remaining significant populations in the Mediterranean. Reproduction occurs in at a minimum of 8 other sites in Turkey. Habitat destruction, fisheries interactions, pollution and human disturbance are the main threats. Figures for by-catch offshore from the Çukurova Delta are far higher than for marine turtles. Trawling poses a severe threat to the species and numbers caught in mid-water trawls are much higher than those caught in bottom trawls. Many are also killed by fisherman because they are aggressive creatures that destroy fishing nets and traps.

Since 1998, MEDASSET has initiated annual field survey assessments of the *Trionyx* population status along the Mediterranean coast of Turkey, and has produced recommendations for its conservation and management to the Standing Committee of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) at the Council of Europe, in order to enable the Convention to follow-up on actions of the Turkish Government. Sadly, since 2003 and despite our 2004 report stating that 'No practical steps nor considerable progress toward conservation could be demonstrated,' the issue has not even been referred to or followed up by the Convention. To ensure the survival of this small Mediterranean sub-population, the following priority actions are recommended:

- Draft a Conservation and Management Action Plan
- Conservation of the most important nesting/mating sites
- Measures against persecution by fishermen and drowning in trawl nets

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