

Recent records of marine turtles (*Chelonia mydas*, *Caretta caretta* and *Eretmochelys imbricata*) in Kuwait

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Abstract: Twenty-four Green Turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) were caught by hadra intertidal fish traps during the winters of 1995 to 1998 near Doha, northern Kuwait. Two died and were preserved, while the others were released. During this period actively swimming turtles were reported from the waters around Mis'chan island in January 1997. This is the first report of turtles entering the intertidal areas of northern Kuwait and of them actively swimming in the cold winter months when water temperatures drop to just above 10°C. Hawksbill Turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) and Loggerhead Turtles (*Caretta caretta*) were recorded from Kuwait for the first time.

Kurzfassung: In den Wintern zwischen 1995 und 1998 wurden 24 Suppenschildkröten (*Chelonia mydas*) in Hadra-Gezeitenfischreusen nahe Doha im Norden Kuwaits gefangen. Zwei von ihnen starben und wurden konserviert, während die anderen wieder freigelassen wurden. Im Januar 1997 wurden auch aktiv schwimmende Schildkröten in den Gewässern um die Mis'chan-Insel beobachtet. Das ist der erste Bericht über Meeresschildkröten, die in die Gezeitengewässer im Norden Kuwaits eindringen und die aktiv in den kalten Wintermonaten schwimmen, wenn die Wassertemperaturen auf nahezu 10°C sinken. Die Echte Karettschildkröte (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) und die Unechte Karettschildkröte (*Caretta caretta*) wurden erstmals für Kuwait nachgewiesen.

Key words: Sea turtles, Kuwait, Northern Arabian Gulf, Middle East.

Introduction

Green Turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) breed and occur in large numbers in the middle and southern parts of the Arabian Gulf, but little attention has been given to the northern part of the Gulf. The literature is vague and unclear as to the status of the turtle populations in the northern Arabian Gulf. GASPERETTI et al (1993) state "the once substantial nesting grounds on the islands of Umm al Maradim and Qaruh and on the shores of southern Kuwait and north-eastern Saudi Arabia are long since defunct". ROSS & BARWANI (1995) show the locations and migration routes of the marine turtles in the Arabian Gulf but indicate that they do not occur in Kuwait. FARMER (1983) and EISSA & EL-Assy (1975) both report one dead turtle washed up on the southern shoreline of Kuwait. No data on the species was given though they concluded it was a Green Turtle, *Chelonia mydas*.

Hawksbill Turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) are known to nest in the Gulf, whereas Loggerhead Turtles (*Caretta caretta*), Olive Ridley Turtles (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) and Leatherback Turtles (*Dermodochelys coriacea*) have been found there only rarely and irregularly (GASPERETTI et al. 1993, KAMI 1997). No records of any of these species are available from the northern part of the Gulf.