

Observations on the trade in sea turtles at the fish market of Alexandria, Egypt

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Abstract. During six months of observations in 1998/1999 at the Alexandria Fish Market, 135 turtles were offered for sale, 85% of which were Loggerhead Turtles, *Caretta caretta*, and the remainder Green Turtles, *Chelonia mydas*. Consumption of the meat was found to be largely favoured amongst those involved in the trade, the fishermen and less well educated people. Awareness of the illegality of the trade in turtles and the need for conservation is relatively low, though the awareness is higher among fishermen and traders than among buyers of turtle meat.

Kurzfassung: Während einer sechsmonatigen Erhebungsphase im Jahr 1998/1999 wurden auf dem Fischmarkt von Alexandria insgesamt 135 Meeresschildkröten zum Kauf angeboten; bei 85% handelte es sich um Unechte Karettschildkröten, *Caretta caretta*, bei den übrigen Tieren um Suppenschildkröten, *Chelonia mydas*. Schildkrötenfleisch wird insbesondere von den Händlern selbst und von Fischern verzehrt, sowie von Personen aus weniger gebildeten Bevölkerungskreisen. Es ist weitgehend unbekannt, dass der Handel mit Meeresschildkröten illegal ist und dass die Meeresschildkröten-Populationen bedroht sind, wenngleich diese Tatsachen bei den Fischern und Händlern einen höheren Bekanntheitsgrad haben als bei den Käufern.

Key words: Marine turtles, *Caretta caretta*, *Chelonia mydas*, fishing, sea products, legal aspects, turtle fishery.

Introduction

Sea turtle populations have seriously declined all over the Mediterranean area for two main reasons: the destruction of their nesting sites due to the rapidly expanding tourist industry, and their interaction with the fisheries. In Egypt there is yet another threat to the sea turtle populations: predation by man on turtle meat, eggs, shells and blood, especially in the Alexandria Fish Market. FLOWER (1933) was apparently the first who recorded this practice. He wrote that he saw a fairly large Loggerhead Turtle, *Caretta caretta* L., at the Alexandria Fish Market. Several recent sightings confirm that this practice still exists.

KASPAREK (1993) again found sea turtles offered for sale at the Alexandria Fish Market in 1993. In his survey of the coastal area between Alexandria and El-Salum, he found Alexandria to be the only place, where turtles are offered for sale. A subsequent study by LAURENT et al. (1996) revealed that over 13 days of observation 35 sea turtles were slaughtered at the Alexandria Fish Market, and he estimated that a thousand individuals are probably killed each year. Recent papers by ÖZHAN (1997), VENIZELOS & NADA (2000) and VENIZELOS & KALLONAS (1999) also confirm that this practice still continues.