

Satellite tracking of a Green Turtle, *Chelonia mydas*, from Syria further highlights importance of North Africa for Mediterranean turtles

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Abstract. In 2006, we tracked a single Green Turtle after nesting Latakia, providing the first evidence of foraging grounds and migratory routes from this rookery which is one of the most important nesting areas in the Mediterranean. Tracking lasted 95 days during which time the turtle migrated southward (minimum average speed = 0.9 km/h) and then westward (minimum average speed = 1.6 km/h), following the coast. The turtle settled in the Bay of As Sallum, western Egypt where it remained in neritic, coastal waters for the final 26 days of transmissions. These results, when combined with findings from Cyprus, Turkey and Greece, further highlight the importance of the North African coast for foraging adult turtles and the need for effective conservation measures to be adopted there.

Key words. Egypt, Syria, Mediterranean, conservation, sea turtle, foraging grounds, migration, North Africa.

Introduction

The Green Turtle, *Chelonia mydas*, population in the Mediterranean has been demonstrated to be relatively discrete from those in the wider Atlantic (BOWEN et al. 1992, ENCALADA et al. 1996). Nesting occurs only in the eastern basin, mainly in Turkey and Cyprus (KASPAREK et al. 2001). The population at monitored beaches was estimated to range between 339 and 360 females nesting annually (BRODERICK et al. 2002), indicating the endangered status of this subpopulation. Recently in Syria – where only Loggerheads (*Caretta caretta*) were previously known to nest (KASPAREK 1995) – a regionally important Green Turtle nesting population was discovered, at Latakia, with an estimated 31-35 individual turtles nesting in 2004. This site is likely the ninth largest nesting aggregation in the Mediterranean Sea (REES et al. 2008).

Using satellite telemetry, GODLEY et al. (2002) elucidated migration routes and foraging grounds for Green Turtles that had nested on Cyprus. Turtles promptly departed the nesting area after making their final nests and the majority migrated south, to overwinter off the North African coast. All five turtles that migrated south travelled through Egyptian coastal waters; four moved into coastal waters of Libya and the transmissions from one turtle ceased abruptly, with the last locations in Egypt. The turtles that were tracked for extended periods at their foraging grounds maintained distinct home ranges in neritic waters (GODLEY et al. 2002). Subsequent studies have shown that Green Turtles display high levels of fidelity to their foraging grounds, having followed similar routes to reach there from the nesting areas, with the turtles moving to deeper water and remaining more sedentary during the winter period (BRODERICK et al. 2007).