



Threats

Perhaps the greatest threat to sea turtles is the interaction with humans. Although all marine turtles are protected they still suffer from being caught in fishing nets. It is estimated that in the eastern part of the Adriatic over 2,500 turtles are caught in trawling nets each year! In many cases turtles that are pulled up in trawling nets are alive but in a state of hibernation, correct treatment of these animals can enable the animals to be revived before being put back into the sea. However replacing them in this state can result in drowning. Discarded hooks of fishermen can be swallowed by a turtle. Thousands of turtles die each year by eating plastic bags, bottles and other rubbish which are thrown into the sea. Floating plastic bags look like jelly fish which is the prey for many sea turtles. The development of tourism has also affected the nesting sites of these turtles. Lights and noise scare and disorientate adults and hatchlings causing population wide problems.



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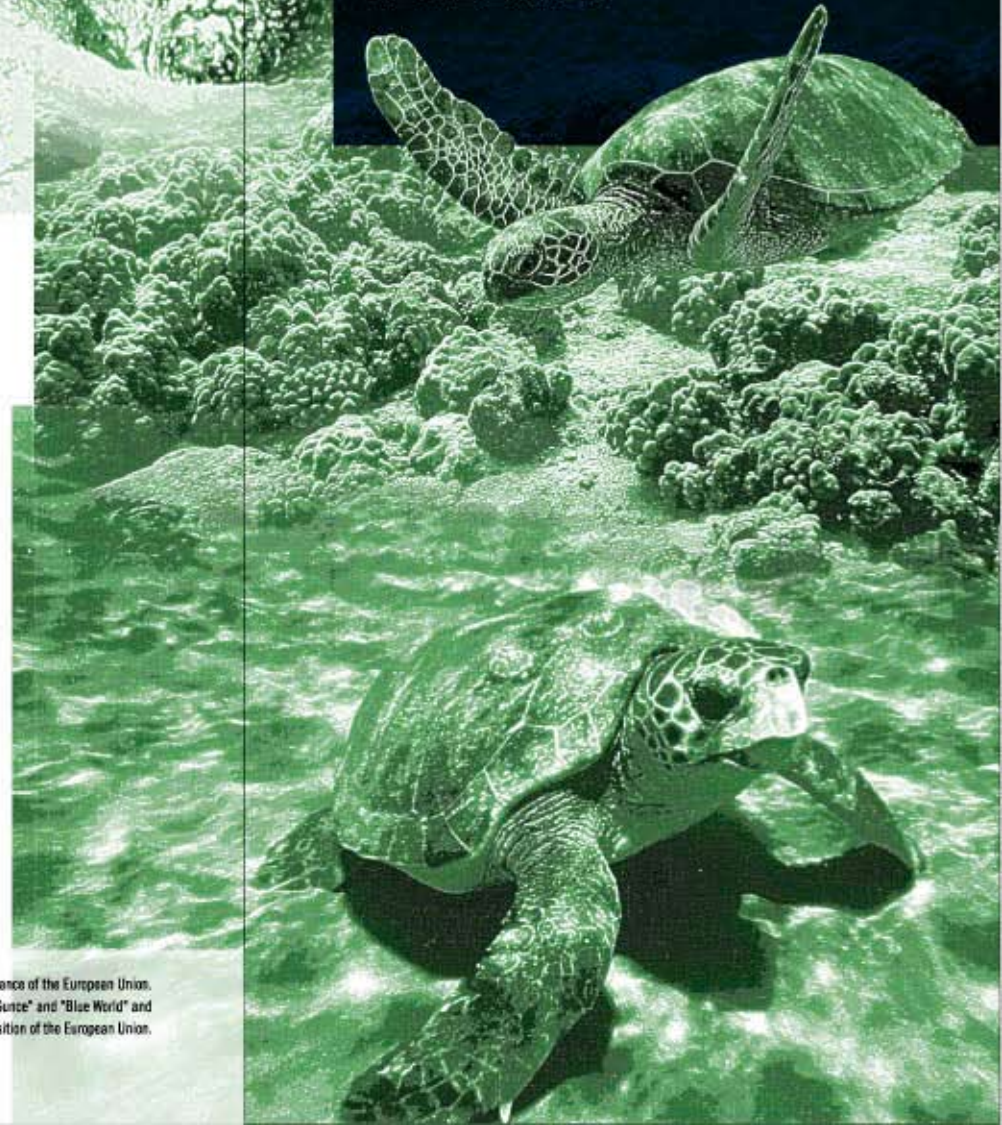
Strengthening the civil society sector
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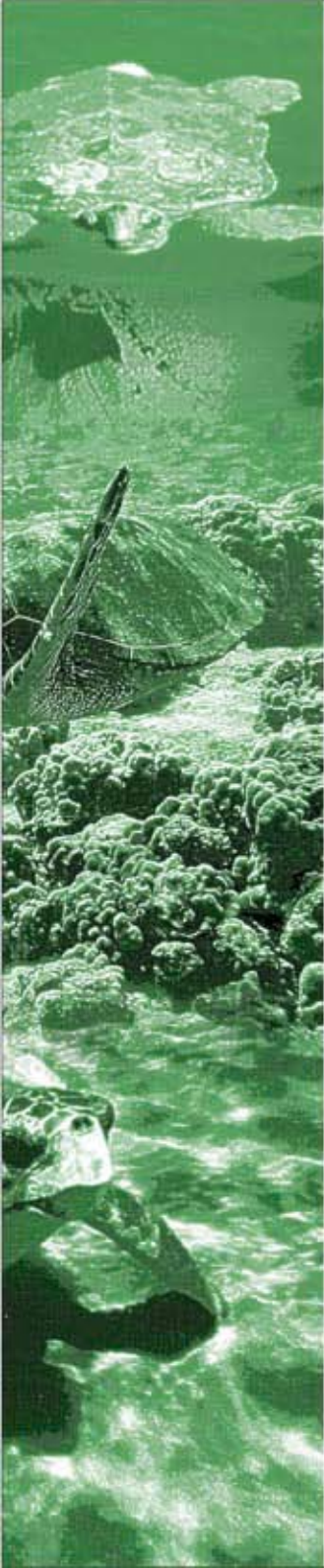


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Sea turtles in the Adriatic





Loggerhead turtle
(*Caretta caretta*)

Sea turtles are ancient reptiles that inhabited land and sea long before dinosaurs. Despite similarities to their land dwelling relatives, sea turtles have some specific characteristics. Their limbs are transformed into fins with the front pair of fins being stronger than the rear pair of fins, but still not strong enough for walking on land. Furthermore, they lost the ability to withdraw their heads into their shells.



Loggerhead turtle (*Caretta caretta*)

This is the most common turtle species in the Adriatic sea. Loggerhead turtles found in the Adriatic are part of the Mediterranean population that nests on the beaches of Turkey, Cyprus and Greece. After years spent in the open seas and upon reaching sexual maturity they come to the northern Adriatic. Availability of turtles' favorite diet - squid, mollusks, starfish, sea urchin, crabs, sponges as well as the shallow, muddy sea bottom makes the northern Adriatic appropriate feeding and hibernation area for sea turtles. Loggerhead turtles can grow more than 2 meters in length and weigh more than 200kg. This species is commonly called the "loggerhead" sea turtle due to their overly large heads and a thick, horny beak.

Leatherback sea turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*)



Green sea turtle (*Chelonia mydas*)



Green sea turtle (*Chelonia mydas*)

Unlike other sea turtles, green sea turtles are herbivorous. They feed on sea-grass and algae which make their fatty tissue appear greenish, hence the name. Although world-wide distributed they visit Adriatic only occasionally. In appearance they resemble loggerhead turtles but can be distinguished by number of lateral scutes on their shell - green sea turtles have 4 lateral scutes while loggerhead turtles have 5.

Leatherback sea turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*)

With the record-holding specimen that weighed 916kg, this is the biggest turtle species in the World! Unlike other turtles, leatherback sea turtle has no hard, bony shell but a rubber-like shell made up of skin tissue. It is easy distinguished by seven ridges on its shell and dark-grey to black color. Although it is the most migratory of all the sea turtles, it can be seen in the Adriatic only very rarely.