

• **Conservation of
Marine Turtles** •
in the Mediterranean Region

Experience Sharing Visit
for Sea Turtle Nesting
Beach Managers

Event Report

10-12 September 2021, Çıralı, Turkey



Overview

Hand in Hand with Municipalities: A brighter future for both local people and sea turtles!

Endangered sea turtles, travel thousands of kilometers each year to reach the TRNC coasts and lay their eggs on the beaches within the borders of TRNC municipalities. Non-governmental organizations and National government are working hard to protect them. The fact that the TRNC tourism logo is a sea turtle, exemplifies how the conservation and awareness-raising efforts, have been adopted by the entire public. These efforts started with the establishment of Society for the Protection of Turtles (SPOT) in 1992 and became stronger with the adoption of turtles by the relevant institutions and organizations. Unfortunately, municipalities have not been effectively involved in the sea turtle conservation process to date.

During the MAVA-funded project "Conservation of Sea Turtles in the Mediterranean" initiated in 2017, we held many meetings with municipalities and we found opportunity for positive collaborations on the protection of sea turtles. As a result, we decided to organize this experience sharing event in order to determine a roadmap in this regard.

With the "Çıralı Experience Sharing Visit for Sea Turtle Nesting Beach Managers" event held on 10-12 September 2021, our aim was to visit one of the sea turtle conservation works carried out with full cooperation of Municipality, NGO and public institutions and the participation of the public. We made this visit with Municipalities hosting important sea turtle nesting beaches. Lapta Mayor Mustafa Aktuğ, Yenierenköy Mayor Emrah Yeşilirmak, Mehmetçik Mayor Cemil Sarıçizmeli, Fırat Borak and Mustafa Ölmez from Dipkarpaz Municipality, Umut Bahadır and Mehmet Erdoğan from Esentepe Municipality and Nurullah Öztürk and Ahmet Dursun from Büyükkonuk Municipality attended the exchange event.

Thanks to the support of WWF-Turkey, the assistance of Lapta Mayor Mustafa Aktuğ and the hospitality of the Ulupınar Environmental Protection Development and Operation Cooperative (Ulupınar Cooperative), we visited Çıralı, where the collaborative conservation work carried out by the Ulupınar Cooperative, Kemer Municipality and National Parks Regional Directorate were presented through talks and field visits. We examined the "nature-friendly tourism" practices carried out by the local people on site. In light of the information we obtained, through some groupwork we evaluated how we can cooperate in this regard in our country. The event was a good initiative for us to strengthen our cooperation with Municipalities and develop healthier coasts and coastal businesses not only for sea turtles but also for our people.



'Experience Sharing Visit for Sea Turtle Nesting Beach Managers' organizers and participants by Çıralı Beach (Photo: Murat Muşlu)

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Robin Snape - Research Fellow (University of Exeter)
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Sevda Fırat - Photographer (WWF Turkey)

Habib Altınkaya - Head of the Ulupınar Environmental Protection Development and Operation Cooperative
Erdal Elginöz - Ulupınar Environmental Protection Development and Operation Cooperative
Derya Yavuz - Yavuz Restaurant & Hotel Manager/Owner
Durmuş Cesur - Caretta caretta Pensiyon Manager/Owner

List of Participants
Mustafa Aktuğ - Mayor of Lapta
Emrah Yeşilirmak - Mayor of Yenierenköy
Belediye Başkanı Cemil Sarıçizmeli - Mayor of Mehmetçik
Fırat Borak ve Mustafa Ölmez from the Municipality of Dipkarpaz
Umut Bahadır ve Mehmet Erdoğan from the Municipality of Esentepe
Nurullah Öztürk ve Ahmet Dursun from the Municipality of Büyükkonuk



With Support



In Collaboration



North Cyprus Society for the Protection of Turtles



Rationale

During the last thirty years SPOT and the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus (TRNC) Department for Environmental Protection have worked collaboratively to identify important sea turtle nesting areas and establish protective measures. With the additional support of the EU Aid Programme for the Turkish Cypriot Community, this work has led to the establishment of five coastal Special Environmental Protection Areas (SEPAs) covering almost 30 % of the coast of North Cyprus, a great achievement. Despite the wide awareness of sea turtle conservation and its importance, Municipalities have often acted independently at nesting beaches, both within and outside of these SEPAs. At some sites development and uncontrolled public use have proceeded with considerable long-term impacts on sea turtles and their habitats. This has become very apparent during recent nesting seasons with Bayram holiday period passing through the summer and because, due to the pandemic, locals could not holiday abroad and so invested their time in holidaying on the coast. Additionally, the public have increasing access to off-road vehicles, quad bikes, beach buggies, caravans, jet skis, speed boats etc, all of which are used at and around beaches within and outside the SEPAs. As SPOT, our vision is that sea turtle conservation can go hand-in-hand with sustainable public use and enterprise, through the right management approach. As local government, Municipalities have a role in regulating development and human use of their beaches which could be capitalised upon, but perhaps are not fully engaged in the national sea turtle conservation effort.

Toward addressing this, under the framework of the MAVA-funded Sea Turtle Conservation in the Mediterranean Region project, it was suggested to organise an exchange visit for TRNC Municipalities and during the steering committee meeting of the project in Dalyan 2019, WWF Turkey kindly offered to provide logistical support. The event was, however, delayed due to the pandemic until September 2021.

The aims of the exchange were broadly:

1. To introduce the Municipalities of key nesting areas in North Cyprus to the sustainable tourism concept at a demonstration site overseas.
2. To explore an example where National Government, Municipality, Civil Society and tourism groups were working well together in a project to benefit coastal biodiversity and local tourism economies.
3. To foster engagement of Municipalities, SPOT and TRNC Department for Environmental Protection in similar initiatives in TRNC.

Çıralı and its Sea Turtles

Çıralı, in the Kemer Municipality of Antalya region, Turkey, is one of the key ecotourism centers in the region. The village hosts local and foreign tourists who want to spend a quiet, nature-friendly holiday surrounded by wildlife.

Just like Alagadi, Kaplıca, Akdeniz and similar beaches in TRNC, the 3.2 km long Çıralı Beach is a sea turtle nesting beach. On the beach, which is mainly used by the loggerhead turtle, *Caretta caretta*, monitoring and protection studies for sea turtles have been carried out by the WWF-Turkey (formerly Society for the Protection of Nature) since 1994 and then continued with collaborations with local stakeholders.

Thanks to the sea turtle conservation efforts, not only the coast, but also the wider Çıralı region has been quite well-preserved. The beach has become an alternative to other natural breeding areas that have been heavily impacted by increasing mass tourism investments in the Antalya region. While the conservation work has actually led to the development of the commerce of the region by offering an alternative form of tourism.

Conservation actions faced many difficulties during the initiation of the project, but these conflicts were overcome over time, with the result that management currently provides opportunity for both the people of the region and the natural life.



Çıralı Beach (Photo: Murat Muşlu)

Through the Turkish Coastal Management and Tourism Project, local people and visitors were informed of the results of long-term systematic studies, and informative signs were placed on the shore with beach rules. Posters and leaflets on measures to be taken on the beach before the season were distributed regularly. Environmental education lessons were given regularly in regional schools, raising awareness about sea turtles among youth, and children were given the opportunity to spend time with volunteers working in the field. Thus, unconscious damage was mitigated through these advocacy actions.

In addition, by meeting with the operators of the businesses on the beach, sun loungers, umbrellas and lighting were provided in a way that would not prevent the nesting of sea turtles. To prevent access to the beach with vehicles, car parks were created in certain areas of the coast in cooperation with the Ulupınar Muhtarlığı and measures have been taken to manage these.

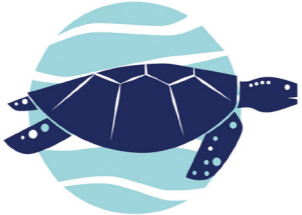
In the light of all these collaborative actions, sea turtle conservation work began to be optimised, and although the Çıralı region was always known as a natural beauty spot, it became a major "grass-roots" ecotourism center in the region.

SPOT


Since its establishment in 1992, SPOT has been taking steady steps towards improving the population of sea turtles, which are endangered species, by identifying important turtle nesting areas, conducting research to guide and optimise their conservation. These efforts have been supported in full by the TRNC Department of Environmental Protection since its establishment, and through our three decades of conservation work in TRNC, a positive nesting trend has been observed.

However, as a result of the increase in tourism pressure (mostly local tourism) and unchecked illegal activities, conservation measures at some beaches have not been successful.


Through the MAVA-funded Conservation of Marine Turtles in the Mediterranean Region project, we were tasked with "scaling-up" nesting beach protection in TRNC, using good example sites as models and applying lessons learned to new sites. We realised the importance of, and opportunities of working in cooperation with local government on nesting beach management. Accordingly, with support of WWF-Turkey, we developed an experience sharing visit to the Çıralı region. Our aim was to demonstrate how some key beaches, could be protected with better intergration of local populations, and in ways that conservation efforts would return rewards to the people of the region as an eco-tourism potential and sustainable development opportunity. By inviting the officials of the Environmental Protection Department and the Tourism Marketing and Promotion Department, Mayors and relevant Municipal staff, we aimed to strengthen the collaboration between these stakeholders and civil society toward a common goal, to understand the current situation, to discuss solutions and develop proposals that could be agreed and implemented in TRNC.



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**DENİZ KAPLUMBAĞASI
YUVALAMA KUMSALI YÖNETİCİLERİ İÇİN
ÇIRALI DENEYİM PAYLAŞIMI ZİYARETİ
10-12 EYLÜL 2021**



Çıralı Visit

On the first day, the Municipality representatives met with SPOT staff at Nicosia-Eran Airport and made the Antalya flight together and were transferred to the Çıralı region. They were met by WWF Turkey officials in Çıralı and had their dinner at an eco-lodge.

While the stakeholders had the opportunity to socialize during the meal, WWF Turkey's Marine and Wildlife Programme Manager, Ayşe Oruç, presented the work carried out by WWF Turkey between 1994-2011 in the Çıralı region.

On the second day, the stakeholders visited the Ancient City of Olympos. During the walk to the site, they had the chance to observe the arrangement of park areas, businesses and signage along the beachfront.

At the Ancient City, participants observed how the tourism value of historical and cultural heritages increased when they were intertwined with natural life, and how through combining the promotion of natural and cultural heritage, it is possible to build more attractive holiday packages for both local and international tourists.

Afterwards, the group visited Caretta caretta pension where the impact of conservation efforts and beach restrictions on tourism was discussed from the perspective of an operator. Manager Durmuş Cesur mentioned that the sea turtle conservation activities in Çıralı were first started by the Wildlife Conservation Society in 1996 and transferred to the local cooperative end of 2011, but that the people of the region could not see the benefit of this situation at that time. But, later, thanks to its relatively untouched state, Çıralı became the subject of more enterprise in the region. He expressed his satisfaction with the current situation whereby conservation status of the area saved the site from being sold to big firms for mass development. He stated that the conservation efforts not only prevented the destruction of the region, but also helped to improve the environment by encouraging investors to invest in the natural feel that the region offers. He explained that the development of sea turtle eco-activities is very beneficial for their businesses, as Çıralı now appeals to a wider tourist portfolio, with the natural beauty of the region and a very different and difficult to obtain holiday concept, that attracts both local and foreign tourists. Noting that the bungalows are placed in a way that covers 1/3 of the land to reflect the lifestyle intertwined with nature, and that each bungalow is independent from another building, with its own garden area, Durmuş Cesur also stated that the pandemic period has minimally affected the tourism potential in the region.



Awareness raising boards on Çıralı Beach
(Photo: Meryem Özkan)



Awareness raising boards on Çıralı Beach
(Photo: Meryem Özkan)



Awareness raising boards on Çıralı Beach
(Photo: Meryem Özkan)

In the afternoon, Habib Altinkaya, President of Ulupinar Cooperative, gave a presentation at the Cooperative Office. Habib shared with the stakeholders the positive and negative reactions of the local people to the project, the effects of the project on the development of the region and the active role of the cooperative. Stakeholders obtained information by asking questions to Habib and received his useful advice about where certain practices would work.

After a tour of the area and a meal at a beach front restaurant, the group met with Erdal Elginöz from Ulupinar Cooperative, to see the conservation work on-site and get first-hand information, to understand the practices at the turtle nesting beaches and the rules to be followed by beach users. He mentioned that it is forbidden to enter the beach with a vehicle along the 3.2 km coastline, that it is forbidden to be on the beach at night except for the cooperative volunteers, to touch the turtle nests all season long, and that penal action is applied if such prohibitions are violated.

Afterwards, two *Caretta caretta* nest excavations were demonstrated. In this process, the stakeholders were very interested and were enthusiastic to participate in similar activities back in Cyprus.



▲ Participants enjoy the Ancient City of Olympos (Photo: Meryem Özkan)



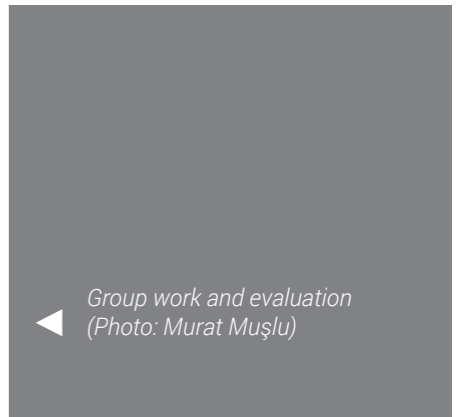
▲ Visiting the Caretta Pension (Photos: Meryem Özkan)



▲ Visiting Ulupinar Environmental Protection Development and Operation Cooperative (Photo: Murat Muşlu)

◀ Turtle nest protection (Photo: Meryem Özkan)

Turtle nest excavation (Photo: Meryem Özkan) ▶



◀ Group work and evaluation (Photo: Murat Muşlu)

Group Work

On the final morning SPOT project staff, the mayors and other Municipality representatives spent about two hours of structured groupwork. To provide a foundation for discussion, SPOT raised a series of key sea turtle nesting beaches in the represented Municipalities including Güzelyalı, Esentepe, Mersinlik, Kaplıca, Ayfılon, Kumyalı and Bafra. A SWOT analysis was compiled to enable us to understand the factors holding back the sustainable public use of nesting beaches.

SWOT Analysis

INTERNAL

Strengths

- Establishment of the Caretta Flag Certification Program.
- Availability of regional zoning plans.
- With the existence of SEPAs, there are non-privatized beaches that can be used for ecotourism purposes, which are currently available to the public.
- Some examples of Municipalities already showing good practices such as at Ayfılon, Dipkarpaz where sunbeds are laid out according to demand and are removed at night, and at Yeni Erenköy public beach where sand dunes have been roped off and walkways provided. Such good case examples can be built on and expanded to other sites.

Weaknesses

- Low communication with SPOT.
- Limited public awareness activities.
- Construction/development occurs with no public consultation.
- Lack of law enforcement of existing legislation on all beaches both in and outside SEPAs.
- Political instability.
- In Tatlısu SEPA Kaplıca beach became an example of complete failure of the conservation process and Mersinlik beach is at great risk.
- One bay of Esentepe beach has been heavily impacted by recent developments.

EXTERNAL

Opportunities

- Potential to develop cooperation (for example, signing a protocol with Esentepe Municipality).
- Organising awareness raising activities in the Municipality.
- Strengthening the awareness-raising activities of municipalities.
- Attracting youth to volunteer from within Municipalities and supporting their development.
- Expanding the scope of the Caretta Flag Program, starting from the Bafra hotels region.
- Tourism alternatives such as ecotourism, pescaturism, bird tourism are on the agenda.
- Creation of well-managed camp, caravan and park areas in the regions.
- One bay at Esentepe is still in good condition and could be safed as a quiet and natural beach for public and turtles.

Threats

- The fact that no planning was made during the construction of the new Kumyalı beach road and no opinion was received, is an example of the threat of uncontrolled and badly planned development.
- Caravan areas expanding rapidly in coastal areas and not working under any legal framework. Lack of enforcement of caravanners and campers.
- Continuation of illegal sand extraction from dune areas.

Based on the results of this group work, collaborative projects have been elaborated with Municipalities and we plan to develop these actions during the final year of the Conservation of Marine Turtles in the Mediterranean Region project.

Ek 1: Ziyaret Programı

10 Eylül 2021, Cuma

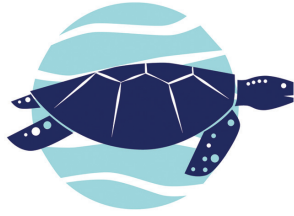
20.00 - 21.00	Çıralı'ya varış, tanışma, akşam yemeği
21.00 - 21.30	Ziyaretin amacı ve WWF-Türkiye'nin Çıralı'da geçmiş çalışmaları (1994-2011) Ayşe Oruç, WWF-Türkiye, Deniz ve Yaban Hayatı Prog. Md.

11 Eylül 2021, Cumartesi

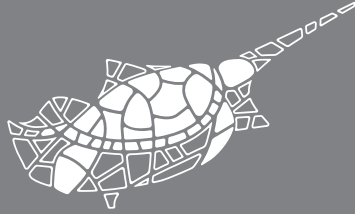
09.30 - 12.30	Olympos Antik Kenti ziyareti
12.45 - 13.45	Öğle yemeği
14.00 - 17.00	Ulupınar Kooperatifi çalışmaları, Kemer Belediyesi ile İşbirliği Protokolü, doğa dostu turizm örnekleri pansiyon ziyaretleri Habib Altınkaya, Ulupınar Çevre Koruma Geliştirme İşletme Kooperatifi Başkanı
17.00 - 19.30	Serbest Zaman
19.30 - 21.00	Akşam yemeği
22.30 - 24.00	Gece deniz kaplumbağası koruma alan çalışması Erdal Elginöz, Ulupınar Çevre Koruma Geliştirme İşletme Kooperatifi

12 Eylül 2021, Pazar

08:00 - 09:00	Kahvaltı
09:00 - 11:00	Kuzey Kıbrıs'ta Neler Yapabileceğimiz Hakkında Fikirler ve Değerlendirmeler
12:00	Otobüs ile Havaalanına doğru yola çıkış



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SPOT
NORTH CYPRUS SOCIETY
FOR THE PROTECTION
OF TURTLES

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Address: 5 Barbaros Sokak, Alagadi Village, North Cyprus (Alagadi Turtle Beach)
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