

Agenda Item 6.1: Open File

Turkey: Habitat Destruction in Mersin, Anamur Beach



44th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention
2-6 December 2024

IMPORTANCE OF ANAMUR SEA TURTLE NESTING SITE

- 12.7km sea turtle nesting beach
- **2nd most important** sea turtle nesting site **in Turkey** & **4th in the Mediterranean** for the loggerhead turtles₁
 - Nests/yr Average = **733**₂
 - Recent years have recorded 1,000+ nests
- The natural habitat of the creek is also an important area for the **Critically Endangered** Mediterranean subpopulation of the Soft-Shelled Nile Turtles (*Trionyx triunguis*)
 - The entire Mediterranean subpopulation of the Soft-Shelled Nile Turtles is estimated to be **less than 1000** adult individuals



₁ IUCN MTSG report *Sea turtles in the Mediterranean*, 2010; Hochscheid et al. 2018. *Sea Turtles in the Mediterranean Region: MTSG Annual Regional Report*

₂ Hochscheid et al. 2018. *Sea Turtles in the Mediterranean Region: MTSG Annual Regional Report*

43rd Bern Convention Standing Committee Decisions (T-PVS(2023)32)

- Complete the rehabilitation and remove soil, trees, and concrete infrastructure put on the nesting beach for the “Beach Arrangement Project” Phases I and II;
- Proceed with the full restoration of the Karaağaç section, to its natural state;
- Prevent further unsustainable stone wall construction along the Dragon River that impacts on the nesting activity and habitat of the *Trionyx triunguis* turtles;
- Provide location information of the “Beach Arrangement Project” including the coordinates of the area, length of the beach occupied, and distance from the shoreline;
- Dismiss the zoning plan change in the Aquapark region affecting the nesting beach that is approved by the Municipality of Anamur and the Mersin Metropolitan Municipality;
- Suspend the geothermal drilling license, which covers the nesting beach, until an EIA process by an independent scientific team evaluates its impact;

43rd Bern Convention Standing Committee Decisions (T-PVS(2023)32 (cont.))

- Return the densest nesting area between Dragon Rivulet, Mamure Castle, and the Pullu Forest Camp to its previous protection status which a new Circular in July 2023 reduced;
- Allocate more staff or cooperate with a university to ensure efficient monitoring and caging;
- Collaborate and communicate with the local NGOs on any issues related to this file.
- The Committee also acknowledged the complainant's ongoing concerns that violations of the national legislation to protect the sea turtles and nesting habitat continue to occur without any consequence for the perpetrators: sand extraction from the beach, vehicles accessing the beach, light and sound pollution, and business expansions.
- It urged the national authorities to ensure that local authorities and local businesses comply with Turkish National law and the Bern Convention's Recommendation No. 66 (1998).
- The Committee decided to mandate an on-the-spot appraisal

NO PROGRESS SINCE FILE OPENING

Most problems identified previously remain and new negative developments are observed.

Positive development:

- Cancellation of the drilling permits on the nesting beach, which was part of the planned geothermal power plant.

New negative developments and observations:

- New threats at KARAAĞAÇ BEACH
- Plowing the beach with construction equipment for "cleaning and organizing" purposes in April 2024
- Ongoing Caravan camping works on the beach near Dragon River,
- Concrete building construction and burial of a septic tank in the coast of the Anemurion Ancient city, which is a nesting beach and a 1st Degree Archaeological Site.
- Negative effects of the stone walls and illegal huts in the Sultan Stream on the habitat of African soft shell turtle.
- The municipality carried out major cleaning and reclamation works in many streams with digger machines in 2024. During the cleaning, aquatic plants that allow African (Nile) soft-shelled turtles and their food fish and other aquatic organisms to shelter and lay eggs were also destroyed.

KARAAĞAÇ BEACH RESTORATION

- **The site is experiencing new threats.**
- A very serious threat is the expansion of the beach facility in the area and its proximity to the sea. Large number of trees (walnut saplings) were planted right next to the facility. An irrigation system was installed. Soil was brought to grow the trees.
- Whereas nature was rehabilitating the sand, **new piles of soil** were observed in November
- A new strawberry greenhouse is being built above the Sarisu Creek. Sarisu Creek is an African soft shell turtle habitat. Reeds were cut alongside its banks and lots of plastic waste is spread around and inside the creek.



“RUINOUS” COASTAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

- **Additional facilities** have been put into operation compared to last year.
- The **lighting, location, beach use and working hours** of these facilities seriously affect sea turtles.
- The number of visitors increased at night due to the activities of the facilities. With the existence of lighting, people's **use of the beach at night also increased**.
- There is no screening in front of the visitors' parking lots to prevent vehicle lights from reaching the nesting areas.
- Facilities and structures in the 1st protection zone **have not been removed**.



New businesses have been established within the scope of the beach arrangement project.

“RUINOUS” COASTAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

- The restaurants, beach clubs, cafes, bungalow accommodation etc. on the beach increase their footprint every year since there is **no authority stops them**.
- Before the Bern Convention On Site Assessment (BCOSA), most of the businesses moved their beach furniture away from the shoreline and they decreased the number of sun lodgers to occupy less space at the beach. However, **after the BCOSA was completed, everything went to the previous state**.
- Authorities walk the beach every day to mark nests but **they do not impose any fine or warn the violators to establish a permanent solution to this problem**.



A typical business in front of the beach development park. Beach furniture marked in red area were removed during the BCOSA. (© MERÇED 8 July 2024)



Another facility in front of the beach development park. Beach furniture moved close to the sea after the BCOSA team left Anamur. (© MERÇED 14 July 2024)

EXCESSIVE LIGHT AND SOUND POLLUTION

- Excessive sound and light pollution severely affects sea turtles. The extent of sound and light pollution is **extremely problematic** and is made worse by the Beach Arrangement Project, restaurants, and entertainment venues operating on the beach, fireworks, and street lighting.



A highly lit restaurant on the beach has increased the intensity and number of lights

ILLEGAL CONSTRUCTIONS CONTINUE

- The authorities are just “watching” as **the increasing violations of the businesses go unpunished and the business owners are becoming increasingly emboldened to commit even greater violations every year.**



“Karaağaç Beach & Restaurant”- Garden and Concrete Floor Construction - August 2024

ILLEGAL CONSTRUCTIONS CONTINUE

- **Concrete building construction and installation of a septic tank** in the Anemurium Ancient city which is a nesting beach and a 1st Degree Archaeological Site. Following the reactions and objections to the concrete construction, the illegal building's upper flat was removed, but the cement foundation and the septic tank were left behind.
- Construction works were carried out in the name of "landscaping and social facilities" on the beach of Anemurium Ancient City.



Ancient City illegal construction of building and septic tank



ILLEGAL CONSTRUCTIONS CONTINUE

- During the nesting season, on 25.06.2024, in the area close to the junction point of the Dragon River and the sea, a **Caravan camp construction was started**. Construction machines entered the nesting beach. They altered the dune surface and made it flat. Then they cut the reeds and poured pebbles on the sand. A few days later caravans were seen parked in the area.



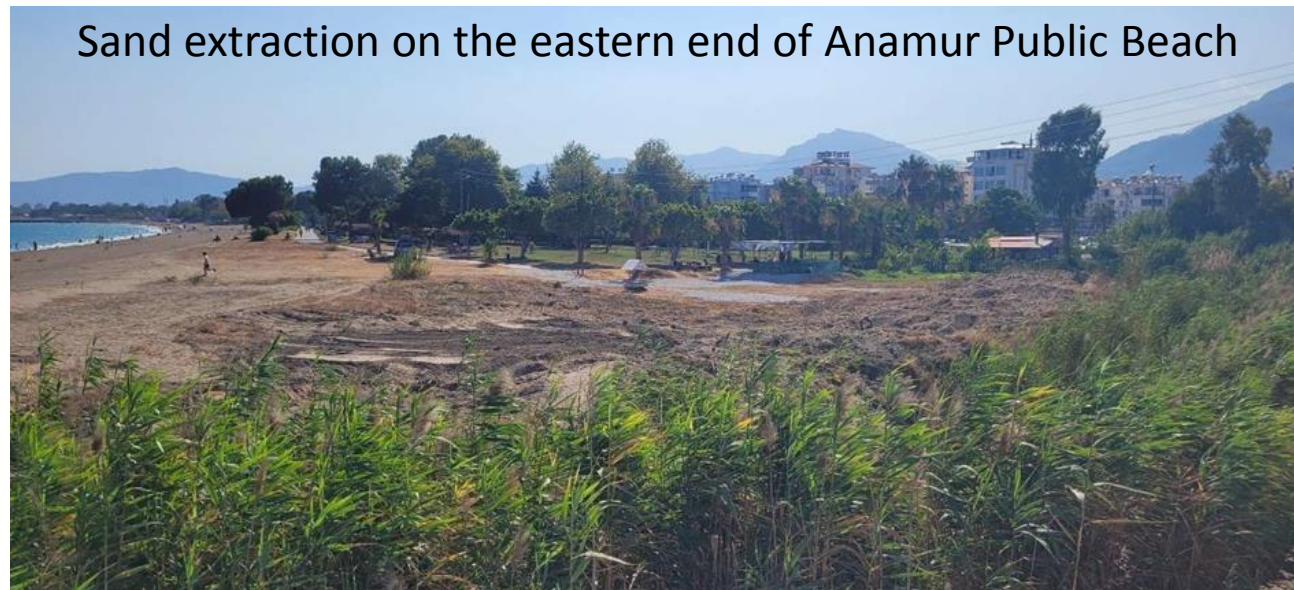
ILLEGAL CONSTRUCTIONS CONTINUE

- In the previous years, before the reclamation of the Dragon River side with a stone wall, the fishermen barracks standing there were removed. **Barracks are now illegally built on the Sultan Stream**, in an area which is a habitat for the African Soft Shell Turtle.



SAND EXTRACTION THREATENS ANAMUR NESTING BEACH

- In violation of National Legislation sand extraction is still evident along the protected nesting beach.
- The facilities established within the scope of the beach arrangement project have a significant impact on the sand of the beach, through **beach leveling and grass planting**. These interventions on the beach must be immediately stopped.
- **Dune disturbance** was detected at Anamur Public Beach, in the construction of a caravan park
- The authorities are not doing enough to protect the beach and to deter the perpetrators.



BEACH LANDSCAPING THREATENS ANAMUR NESTING BEACH

- The Municipality's **construction machines plowed the sand** on the Anamur nesting beach, as if it was a farm field, **in April 2024** in the name of “beach landscaping, cleaning and preparation for the summer”.
- This activity **harms the ecosystem** consisting of every living thing from microorganisms to dune plants and vegetation that keeps the beach healthy.
- **It compacted the sand right before nesting begins, threatening the ability of sea turtles to nest.**



ILLEGAL VEHICLE ACCESS TO THE BEACH IS RAMPANT

- During the survey, **illegal vehicle entries were detected in almost all areas**. No measures in place to restrict beach access!
- There is **no progress to install permanent barriers** to prevent vehicle access to the beach. This situation not only causes cars and even towed boats to enter the beach, but also allows groups to come to the beach late at night, playing loud music from the car, causing glare with headlights, leaving lots of garbage behind, including broken glass bottle pieces. In addition, entering the beach by vehicle makes it easier to steal sand.



Vehicle parked on the nesting area next to nests



Vehicle tracks on the beach

DRAGON ÇAYI RIVULET RIVERBANK DESTRUCTION

Alteration of the natural riverbank at Dragon Çayi Rivulet destroyed this habitat of the **critically endangered** African Soft Shell turtle. **No restoration was observed.**



Natural riverbank with Soft Shell Nile turtle tracks



2023



African soft shell turtle (*Trionyx triunguis*) welcomes the Bern Convention OSA team in the Dragon River



2024

SOFT SHELL NILE TURTLES (*TRIONYX TRIUNGUIS*) IN DIRE NEED OF PROTECTION

- According to academic publications African soft shell turtles (*Trionyx triunguis*) were reported in four areas in Anamur. These places are: Dragon Rivulet, Sultan Stream, Sarisu Stream and the Durağan wetland region between Dragon River and the Mamure Castle.
- Three of these four areas were recently covered with stone walls. These walls have destroyed their nesting habitats.
- Government officials stated during the Bern Convention OSA that no data was collected on the *Trionyx triunguis* turtles in Anamur, because this species was not included in the National Biodiversity Inventory records.
- In addition, the authorities admitted that there is no available human resource to collect data for *Trionyx triunguis*.



A *Trionyx triunguis* turtle caught during channel cleaning activity in the Akdeniz Neighborhood November 2024

LACK OF MONITORING & PROTECTION MEASURES

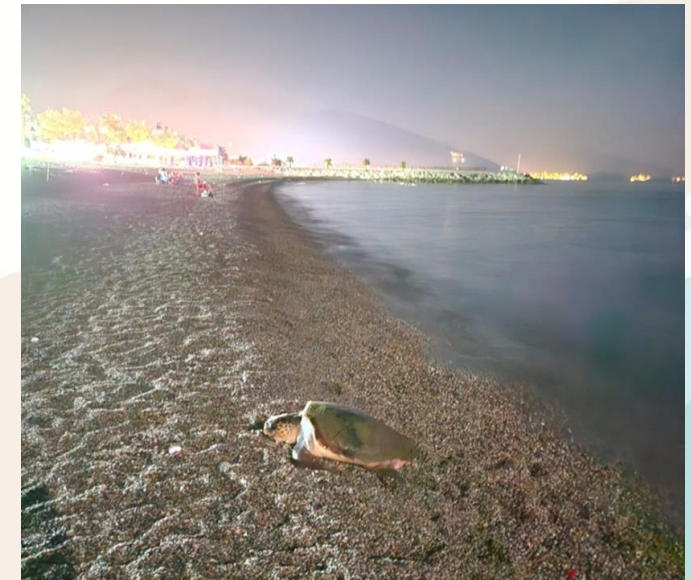
- There is **no regular and standard monitoring** study on the Anamur nesting beach. The Nature Conservancy and National Parks have assigned **only one person** for nest counting and caging of the 12+ km length of the beach!
- There is an **urgent need for more staff** as one person is insufficient. Monitoring, conservation, and raising awareness work should be carried out with professional/academic support.



The only person monitoring the 12+ km of Anamur Beach



Green Sea Turtle hatchlings born at an unmarked nest



A Caretta caretta emerging to nest. Notice the light pollution

We encourage the Turkish Government to:

- Ensure local authorities and local businesses comply with the Turkish National law Circular # B.18.0.DMP.0.01.03 and the Bern Convention's Recommendation No. 66 (1998). Enforce the regulations and penalize perpetrators for violations of the protection measures (e.g. sand extraction, business expansions, light, and noise pollution, etc).
- Allocate more staff and work with experts from a university, to ensure efficient and significant prevention, monitoring and data collection is performed.
- Immediately establish and operate the sea turtle commission, as decided during the Bern Convention OSA.
- Ensure that the positive cooperation and communication established with local NGOs during the Bern Convention OSA process continues.
- Update the Ministry's National Biodiversity Inventory records to collect and include Green turtle's (*Chelonia mydas*) and African soft shell turtle's (*Trionyx triunguis*) data. Publish the number of nests separately, according to the sections of the beach and all existing sea turtle species (*Caretta caretta*, *Chelonia mydas* and *Trionyx triunguis*).
- Ensure that the data collection process on sea turtle nests follows international protocols, (For example, GPS data of the nests should be recorded.)
- Rehabilitate the stone walls alongside of the Dragon River, Sultan Creek and Sarisu Creek. Release more water from the Hydroelectric Power Plant in Dragon Stream. Sedimentation flow must be ensured.
- Fix the lighting of parks, tourism businesses, official premises, street lamps etc. on the entire nesting beach.
- Install permanent barriers to prevent illegal vehicle access to the beach.
- Dismiss the zoning plan change in the Aquapark region.

We call upon the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention

to:

- Encourage authorities to **urgently implement the necessary actions** listed above and in Dr. Reese's OSA report.

Thank you for your attention!