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CONVENTION ON THE CONSERVATION OF EUROPEAN WILDLIFE
AND NATURAL HABITATS

Standing Committee

41st meeting
Strasbourg, 29 November – 3 December 2021

Possible File: 2019/05

**Habitat destruction in Mersin Anamur Beach
(Turkey)**

- REPORT BY THE COMPLAINANT -

*Document prepared by
MERÇED and MEDASSET*

UPDATE REPORT BY THE NGO

Marine Turtle Conservation in the Mediterranean

LOGGERHEAD SEA TURTLE (*CARETTA CARETTA*) & SOFT SHELL NILE TURTLE (*TRIONYX TRIUNGUIS*) CONSERVATION MONITORING IN ANAMUR, MERSIN, TURKEY

13 August 2021

Document produced by
MERÇED - Mersin Environment and Nature Association Deputy
& presented by
MEDASSET - the Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtles

for the 41st Standing Committee Meeting of 2021 the Contracting Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention)

MERÇED and MEDASSET hereby submit an update report to the 2nd Bureau Meeting of the Bern Convention (September 2021) on the conservation status of loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*) nesting beaches and habitats of the Nile soft-shell turtle (*Trionyx triunguis*) in Anamur, Turkey.

Contents:

- *SUMMARY*
- *DETAILED UPDATE*
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SUMMARY

Since the August 2020 report (T-PVS/Files 2020 54), the status of the two coastal development projects at Anamur have remained almost the same, with continued violations recorded along the protected nesting beach. Lack of law enforcement, inspections, and sanctions has facilitated the continuation of sand extraction and expansions of beach businesses. Some restoration works have been carried out at the illegal picnic area of Karaağaç, with the partial removal of the soil that was poured on top of the sand, but the site has yet to be restored to its natural state. No information has been provided regarding the payment of Ministry fines, issued to the local Municipality for the illegal works. Furthermore, no collaboration or communication has been provided by any authority regarding the proposed 95,000m² Coastal Arrangement Project and the development of its tourist facilities, which will stretch along 5km of Anamur's coastline.

MERÇED and MEDASSET calls upon the authorities to:

- Provide an update on the litigation process regarding the restoration and payment of fines for the illegal Picnic Area at Karaağaç.
- Enforce the full restoration of Karaağaç to its natural state.
- Provide an open and transparent consultation for the new "Coastal Arrangement Project" and all proposal plans.
- Implement a Public Awareness Campaign and ensure local businesses and local authorities comply with Turkish National law (Circular # B.18.0.DMP.0.01.03) and the Bern Convention's Recommendation No. 66 (1998).
- Collaborate and communicate with the local NGOs.

- Prevent further unsustainable development along the nesting beach of Anamur, which will result in the damage of the protected habitat and severely impact nesting activity.

MERÇED and MEDASSET calls upon the Bern Convention Standing Committee to:

- Encourage authorities to urgently implement all actions listed above.
- Discuss this ‘possible case file’ at the 41st Meeting of the Standing Committee
- Open a case file
- Conduct an on-the-spot assessment during 2022 to collect the information needed in order to address the complaint

DETAILED UPDATE

Anamur sea turtle nesting beach (Fig.1) is identified as the second most important *Caretta caretta* nesting beach in Turkey, supporting on average 791 nests annually (Casale *et al.* 2018). The 12km beach is one of 21 protected nesting beaches under the National Circular (2009/10), Ministry of Environment and Forestry #B.18.0.DMP.0.01.03/831.02, for the protection of Sea Turtles. Furthermore, the Creek, canals and streams in the surrounding area of Anamur nesting beach have been identified by MEDASSET as an important reproductive site for the Vulnerable Nile soft-shell turtle (*Trionyx triunguis*) (Kasperek 2000).

MERÇED volunteers have monitored the site since 2011, and have provided the updated information below on the conservation status of the nesting beach of Anamur. The report presented by MEDASSET, contains information up to 11 August 2021. All photos are taken by MERÇED unless stated otherwise.

Observations & Updates at Karaağaç Illegal Picnic Area

Since the loss of the Municipality’s appeal to the courts, no communication has been provided regarding the payment of the initial fine issued in 2019, by the government authorities for the illegal works.

Despite the advice of the Bureau, **no collaboration or communication has occurred** between MERÇED and the authorities in regards to the recommendations of the Scientific Committee (ScC), for the on-the-spot-appraisal (OSA), the rehabilitation of the site or details of the work to be carried out to restore Karaağaç to its natural state. To date, heavy machinery has removed some of the soil placed (Fig. 2), but rubble and soil remains (Fig. 3) and the site has not been restored to its natural state.

No restoration works have occurred for the stone wall built (Fig. 4), which replaced the natural reed bed bordering the Sarisu Creek, located directly behind the nesting beach. For 10 years, MERÇED volunteers have monitored the banks of Sarisu Creek for the presence of the Nile soft-shelled turtle, on average recording 4-6 individuals per year. Since the destruction of this natural habitat, no Nile soft-shelled turtles have been recorded.

Observations & Updates for the Landscape Project

In the National Circular for the protection of Sea Turtles, in the Second Protection Zone, it states that ‘(b) Activities that will be detrimental to the geomorphological structure of the sand dunes or that will be harmful for flora and fauna species, road construction, sand extraction, altering the shape of the beach and animal grazing are forbidden.’ No further details of the proposed landscape project or conclusions from the OSA conducted by the ScC have been communicated or shared with the local NGO. Of great concern is how the structures proposed, e.g. bike and pedestrian road, open sport field, mini golf etc., are in line with the Circular and will not be detrimental to the geomorphological structure of the sand dunes and furthermore are proposed as ‘temporary structures’. As no communication or collaboration with the local NGO has taken place, it is unknown if the Scientific Committee of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has discussed this project. To date, no works for this proposed project has begun.

Observations on other activities and impacts

As stated in previous reports, the Municipality along with the Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks continues to fail to implement and enforce any adequate conservation measures to protect the nesting beach, despite publicly declaring to protect the nests (Fig. 5). Light pollution occurs along the nesting beach from apartments and local businesses (Fig. 6), and beach furniture is not removed from the nesting beach at night (Fig. 6 &7). Failure to implement conservation measures are presenting risks to nesting activity of both the adults and emerging hatchlings. Furthermore, the degradation of the nesting beach continues, with the unhindered expansion of businesses on the beach (Fig. 8) and the extraction of sand (Fig. 9), despite prohibited by National legislation.

The local Municipality is proposing further development projects along the protected coastline. At the beginning of 2021, Anamur Municipality requested a change in the established protection zone, to enable further construction works to be carried out within Anamur's protected area. This was approved by the Mersin Metropolitan Municipality in February 2021. MERÇED has submitted petition letters opposing the change to both authorities in April 2021, but to date, no response was received.

ANNEX: BACKGROUND

For a full description of the site and of the case background, see MERÇED & MEDASSET 2020 Update Report

In May 2019, Anamur Municipality began the illegal work to make a ‘public beach and picnic area’ at Karaağaç. Sand was removed, soil placed, and alien species planted (grass and trees). The lawn and trees were maintained with sprinklers, which created water runoff onto the nesting beach. Directly behind the site, Sarısu Creek had its natural reed bed removed and a stone wall was built. These illegal activities destroyed the natural protected landscape. The Ministry issued fines to the local Municipality and ordered the site to be restored to its natural state. Anamur Municipality appealed this order, which was dismissed by the National Court in January 2021. Full restoration of the site is yet to be completed and the status of the payment of the fines is unknown.

In February 2020, Anamur Municipality announced another larger proposed landscape project, ‘A Coastal Arrangement Project’, stretching 5km along the back of Anamur nesting beach. To date no communication or collaboration has occurred between the authorities and MERÇED and the status of this project is unknown to the local NGO.

COMPLAINT & REPORTS SUBMITTED TO THE BERN CONVENTION

T-PVS/Files (2021)27. MERÇED & MEDASSET. Update Report. Loggerhead Sea Turtle (*Caretta caretta*) & Soft Shell Nile Turtle (*Trionyx triunguis*) Conservation Monitoring in Anamur beach, Mersin, Turkey
9pp

T-PVS/Files (2020) 54. MERÇED & MEDASSET. Update Report. Loggerhead Sea Turtle (*Caretta caretta*) & Soft Shell Nile Turtle (*Trionyx triunguis*) Conservation Monitoring in Anamur beach, Mersin, Turkey
44pp

MERÇED. 2019. Complaint to the Bern Convention regarding Habitat destruction in Mersin Anamur Beach (Turkey). 11pp

ANNEX: REFERENCES

*Casale P., Boderick A.C., Camiñas J.A., Cardona L., Carreras C., Demetropoulos A., Fuller W. J., Godley B. J., Hochscheid., Kaska Y., Lazar B., Margaritoulis D., Panagopoulou A., Rees A. F., Tomás J. & Törkozan O. (2018) ‘Mediterranean sea turtles: current knowledge and priorities for conservation and research’ *Endangered Species Research* 36: 22- 267. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3354/esr00901>*

Kasperek M. (2000) ‘An assessment in the Çukurova Delta with Recommendations for Conservation Management’ Report for the 20th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Convention of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention).

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ANNEX: MAPS & PHOTOGRAPHS



Fig. 1 | Google Earth image. Insert: Location of Anamur sea turtle nesting beach along the Mediterranean coastline of Turkey. **Main:** Red line depicts the 12km protected sea turtle nesting beach of Anamur and the locations (yellow pins) of illegal and proposed activities.



Fig. 2 | Karaağaç 31 March 2021: Heavy machinery removing illegally placed soil for picnic area.



Fig. 3

Karaağaç 20th July 2021: Soil placed ontop of sand has been partially removed, but rubble remains and the site has not been fully restored to its natural state. Signs on beach mark turtle nests (circled).



Fig. 4 | Karaağaç 31 March 2021: No restoration works have occurred for Sarisu Creek- the stone wall still remains. Heavy machinery removing the soil from the back of the beach in the background.



Fig. 5 | Anamur 5 June 2021: The Mayor of Anamur and Chief of the Nature Conservation & National Parks pose holding a sign stating 'Let's Protect the Nests'.



Fig. 6 | Anamur 11 August 2021: Light pollution sources (Red circles) on and behind nesting beach from local businesses. Beach furniture is not removed from nesting beach at night.



Fig. 7 | Anamur, 11 August 2021: Beach furniture is not removed by local businesses at night from nesting area. Signs mark sea turtle nests, as recorded by MERÇED volunteers.



Fig. 8 | Anamur, 11 August 2021: MERÇED volunteers record the unhindered spatial expansion of businesses on the nesting beach. Signs mark sea turtle nests, as recorded by MERÇED volunteers.



Fig. 9 | Anamur 27 April 2021: Use of heavy machinery on the beach for the removal of sand, prohibited under National Legislation.

UPDATE REPORT BY THE NGO

Marine Turtle Conservation in the Mediterranean

LOGGERHEAD SEA TURTLE (*CARETTA CARETTA*) & SOFT SHELL NILE TURTLE (*TRIONYX TRIUNGUIS*) CONSERVATION MONITORING IN ANAMUR, MERSIN, TURKEY

26 February 2021

Updated 2 March 2021

Document presented by

MERÇED - Mersin Environment and Nature Association Deputy

&

MEDASSET - the Mediterranean Association to Save the Sea Turtles

for the 41st Standing Committee Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention)

MERÇED and MEDASSET hereby submit an update report to the first Bureau Meeting of the Bern Convention (April 2021) on the conservation status of loggerhead sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*) nesting beaches and habitats of the Nile soft-shell turtle (*Trionyx triunguis*) in Anamur, Turkey.

Contents:

- *SUMMARY*
- *DETAILED UPDATE*
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SUMMARY

Since the August 2020 report (T-PVS/Files 2020 54), the status of the two coastal development projects at Anamur have remained the same, with additional violations recorded along the protected nesting beach: waste water pollution, sand extraction and beach business expansion with the use of heavy machinery. Businesses further occupy beach areas, due to the lack of law enforcement, of inspections and sanctions. No habitat restoration has occurred, nor fines paid by the Municipality for the illegal picnic area at the “Karaağaç” beach section. Construction of the proposed 95,000m² Coastal Arrangement Project for the development of tourist facilities stretching along 5km coastline has not started, although the plan remains.

MERÇED and MEDASSET calls upon the authorities to:

- Provide an update on the litigation process regarding the illegal Picnic Area at Karaağaç section.
- Enforce the restoration of the Karaağaç section to its natural state.
- Provide a full description and official position on the new “Coastal Arrangement Project”.
- Ensure local businesses and local authorities comply with Turkish National law (Circular # B.18.0.DMP.0.01.03) and the Bern Convention’s Recommendation No. 66 (1998).
- Collaborate and communicate with the local NGOs.
- Prevent further unsustainable development along the nesting beach of Anamur that shall result in irreversible damage on the habitat and severe impacts on the nesting activity.

MERÇED and MEDASSET calls upon the Bern Convention Standing Committee to:

- Encourage authorities to urgently implement necessary actions listed above.
- Conduct an on-the-spot assessment in summer 2021 to collect information needed in order to address the complaint.

DETAILED UPDATE

The local NGO, MERÇED, has provided the updated information on the conservation status of the nesting beach of Anamur. The report presents the current situation until 28 February 2021.

1. Karaağaç Picnic Area

No habitat restoration has occurred and fines issued have not been paid by the Municipality. MERÇED are aware that the Municipality's court appeal was rejected, but have not seen or received any official documentation or communication. The NGOs have not been invited to any meetings or discussions with the authorities despite the encouragement of the Standing Committee in Dec.2020. The transferred trees (alien species) planted on the sand dunes were uprooted by local environmental conditions of winter storm tides [R1-2], highlighting the incompatibility of the development of the picnic area and the transferred alien plant species within the natural dynamic environment of the sand dune system (Fig. 1-3).

2. Coastal Arrangement Project

To date, no development work on the additional 95,000m² Coastal Arrangement project has begun. The proposed development of bicycle and pedestrian paths, showers, toilets, green areas and cafeterias will transform 5km of the coastal area along the back of the nesting beach [R3]. The official position on the proposed project (including information on the protected status of the area and how the project affects this, the impact assessment process undertaken, etc), which is essential at this stage, and the reason for lack of development to date is not known, as there is no collaboration or communication of the authorities' with MERÇED or other relevant local NGOs. The only communication received on this project is indirectly through a televised interview of the Mayor of Anamur, where he states: *"We hope we will figure out the circular at the point of Bern Convention. We all look forward to an Anamur with a super beach project"* [R4-5].

3. New Violations

3.1. Sand Extraction

In disregard of Recommendation No. 66 (1998) and the Turkish Circular on sea turtle protection [R5], the Municipality was again observed extracting sand from within the 1st Protection Area of the nesting beach [R6] east of the Karaağaç picnic area (Fig. 4). The continual actions of sand extraction activities will have a detrimental impact on the nesting beach habitat. This beach not only provides nesting habitat for *Caretta caretta* but is also the natural habitat of endemic sand lilies.

3.2. Local Business Expansions

As stated in our August 2020 report, beach businesses operating during the sea turtle breeding period cause high levels of disturbance and threaten nesting activity, due to their beach furniture, lights, beach showers, etc. Over the winter months, two businesses ("Mavi Ay Tea Garden" and "Atalay Tea Garden") have further expanded their operations within the 1st Protection Area of the nesting beach, in some places within 20m of the shoreline:

- "Mavi Tea Garden" leases beach plots to caravans, all year round [R7]. Occupants have been observed disposing of their waste directly onto the beach (Fig. 5).
- "Atalay Tea Garden" attempted to expand their car parking area to accommodate a higher number of tourists, by dumping soil on the sand of the protected nesting beach [R8] (Fig. 6a). Local environmentalists protested against the expansion, and the Head of the Nature Conservation and National Parks Department (Mr Mürsel BULUT) stated on February 5, 2021[R8], that the soil was removed by construction equipment. However, as seen in Fig. 6b, although most of the soil was removed, a significant part of it was further spread, covering the sandy area on the nesting beach.

These actions are carried out in disregard of Rec. No 66 (1998): *"c. Improve control of the effects on the beaches of local tourism, secondary summer homes, caravans, camping and other activities that may be detrimental to the environmental quality of the beaches; remove present adverse effects of these activities on nesting beaches."* The Anamur Animal Protection Association members signed a petition and submitted it to the Anamur District Governorate, for the removal of the soil and caravans that pollute the beach and also for the removal of all tourism companies occupying the nesting beach in the 1st and 2nd protection zone.

On 26th February 2021, a new development caused further deterioration of Anamur's sea turtle nesting beach. Yalçınkayalar Beach Club carried out works within the 1st protection zone. Corrugated iron barriers were placed approximately 20 – 25m from the waterline and heavy machinery moved sand from the front of the beach, behind the barriers to create an elevated area (Fig. 7-11). An NGO volunteer, who was there

incidentally, stated “*the work done is prohibited and wrong*”, the business representative said that “*we put the barriers so that the turtles would not go up and the beach will be raised. We pay rent to the Local Authorities for this place. We can do whatever we want.*” More tables or sunbeds will likely be added to the elevated area. The development has been reported to the Nature Conservation and National Parks Directorate. This new violation highlights a continuing trend of complete disregard for international and national legislation by the local municipality and local businesses at Anamur, which is exacerbating the deterioration of the sea turtle nesting site.

3.3. Untreated Wastewater Pollution

Re-occurring pollution events are caused by the release of untreated wastewater (including sewage) into the Sarisu Creek from the local Waste Water Pumping Station (Fig. 12-14). The pumping station transports wastewater to the Treatment Station, however, on several occasions this untreated wastewater has been released directly into the Creek. The most recent pollution event occurred for over a week during January 2021 due to maintenance repairs to the system. This creek is the natural habitat for the Critically Endangered Soft Shell Nile Turtle (*Trionyx triunguis*). This situation is in violation of Turkish regulations (Date: 31.12.2004 Issue: 25687 “Water Pollution Control Regulation” Updated at 13/2/2008 by change number 26786 - Article # 23).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Damaged sand dunes and vegetated areas should be **restored** to their natural state.
- Remaining unbuilt beach areas should be **secured against development**.
- Local authorities and businesses should be made **aware of the regulations and their responsibilities** as per the Turkish Circular for the protection of Sea Turtles.
- Development of a **management plan** that will cover both the land and marine areas should be formulated that will include a clear description of permitted land uses and activities.
- **Guarding** needs to be improved and conservation managers measures effectively enforced.
- **Scientific monitoring and nest protection** should begin at the start of the nesting season to ensure the detection and protection of all nests.
- **Beach furniture, sunbeds and umbrellas etc.** should be zoned on the beach during the day to protect the nests and removed at night to eliminate obstacles to nesting females. Fixed structures, such as arboreal pavilions, and cabanas should not be allowed.
- Water from **beach showers** should be channelled to not directly run off onto the nesting beach, or beach showers should be relocated away from the beach.
- **Information signs** should be improved and additional signs installed at all entry points on the beach.
- **Vehicle access** needs to be restricted, with barricades installed to prevent motorised entry onto the beach. **Parking areas** need to be designated in appropriate areas that do not compromise the integrity of the coastal dune or protected beach system.
- **Visitor access** must be managed with designated access points to the beach. **Wedding ceremonies, bonfires, night parties, fireworks, camping, picnic and barbecue** activities should not be permitted on the nesting beach or surrounding dune system.
- **Lights:** business owners should be required to screen or paint with dark colours all lights shining onto the beach that cannot be switched off during night hours during the nesting and hatching season. This does not incur a high cost and is feasible.
- **Pollutants**, such as sewage, chemical, pesticide waste should not be released into the Canals, creeks, and streams
- **Illegal constructions** on the whole Anamur Beach and Dragon Çayı Rivulet should be removed.
- **Sand extraction** should be strictly prohibited and penalties applied to deter illegal activities.
- **Awareness Campaign** (workshops and seminars) to proactively engage the local community and tourists about the protection of sea turtles and wildlife of Anamur Beach.

REFERENCES

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- [R2] Facebook Page of “Anamur Environmental Volunteers” : The Waves Unrooted the Second Party of the Trees - 15 January 2021
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- [R3] The Municipality Web page - Title: Beach Arrangement Project is Starting. - Dated 27.02.2020
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- [R4] Interview with the Mayor of the Anamur: www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLjZaQbkqUs
- [R5] Circular # B.18.0.DMP.0.01.03 / 831.02 dated October 2009 (2009/10) - About the protection of the sea turtles, Released by the General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry
- [R6] Facebook Page of “Anamur Environmental Volunteers” : The Lorries of the Municipality are Carrying Sand Extracted from Nested Beach - www.facebook.com/949710881892145/posts/1648940141969212/
- [R7] Facebook Page of “Anamur Environmental Volunteers” : Tea Garden Rents Beach to Caravans – www.facebook.com/949710881892145/posts/165499928029900
- [R8] Facebook Page of “Anamur Environmental Volunteers” : Tea Garden Dumped Soil at the Beach
www.facebook.com/949710881892145/videos/431066007984945
- [R9] Marine Turtles Turkey. Status survey 1988 and recommendations for conservation and management, Prof. Dr. İbrahim Baran and Dipl.-Biol. Max Kasparek, 1989
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REPORTS & COMPLAINT SUBMITTED TO THE BERN CONVENTION

Available online at www.medasset.org or www.coe.int

T-PVS/Files (2020)23. MERÇED. March 2020. ‘Habitat Destruction in Mersin Anamur Beach (Turkey)’. Complaint Form.

T-PVS/Files (2020)54. MERÇED & MEDASSET. August 2020. ‘Loggerhead Sea Turtles (*Caretta caretta*) Soft Shell Nile Turtles (*Trionyx triunguis*) & Conservation Monitoring Anamur Beach, Mersin, Turkey’. Update Report.

RELEVANT RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE:

- Rec. No. 7 (1987) on the protection of marine turtles and their habitat
Rec. No. 8 (1987) on the protection of marine turtles in Dalyan and other important areas in Turkey
Rec. No. 12 (1988) concerning the protection of important turtle nesting beaches in Turkey
Rec. No. 24 (1991) on the protection of some beaches in Turkey of particular importance to marine turtles
Rec. No. 66 (1998) on the conservation status of some nesting beaches for marine turtles in Turkey.

ANNEX: MAPS & PHOTOGRAPHS



Fig. 1. Anamur nesting beach: Karaağaç Picnic Area. 14.12.2020. Waves uprooted planted trees.



Fig. 2. Anamur nesting beach: Karaağaç Picnic Area. 15.01.2021. Waves uprooted more planted trees.



Fig. 3. Anamur nesting beach: Karağaç Picnic Area. 17.01.2020. View of the Picnic Area: no restoration has been implemented despite official orders.



Fig. 4. Anamur nesting beach. 22.01.2021. Lorries Carrying Sand Extracted from the Nesting Beach.



Fig. 5. Anamur nesting beach. 31.01.2021. Beach business leases space for caravans that occupy the 1st Protection Area of the beach. The red circle shows a hose dumping waste (probably sewage or wastewater) into a hole dug in the ground.



Fig. 6. Anamur nesting beach. Top(a): 31.01.2021. Bottom (b): 06.02.2021. Beach business increases occupied area and dumps soil on the nesting beach.



Fig. 7. Anamur nesting beach. 07.01.2021. Location of the Waste Water Pumping Station and the Treatment Station that is polluting Sarisu Creek and the nesting beach.



Fig. 8. Anamur nesting beach. Wastewater Pumping Station (red circle) adjacent to Sarisu Creek.



Fig. 9. Anamur nesting beach. 7.01.2021. Release of untreated wastewater into Sarisu Creek.