



Conservation programme for the Ionian Sea region concerning habitats of species threatened with extinction (LIFE92 NAT/GR/013800)

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Duration : 01-OCT-1992 -> 01-DEC-1995

Total Budget in € : 2.000.000

LIFE Contribution in € : 1.500.000 (75,00 %)

Description :

The loggerhead turtle and the monk seal are both endangered worldwide; in fact the monk seal is the rarest seal in the world with only around 500 individuals left. Like the brown bear, they too were the subject of special European Parliament Reports in 1988 which called for urgent conservation efforts by the EC. Significant numbers are still found in the Ionian Sea off western Greece but, as elsewhere, they are declining. Turtles and seals die by accidental entanglement in nets or starve as fish stocks shrink as a result of commercial over-exploitation. Pollution takes its toll, notably of turtles who swallow plastic litter, mistaking it for prey. Fishermen kill monk seals because they are held to be competitors for fish, while the beaches where turtles lay their eggs are disturbed by tourism development.

The project covers the waters and coasts of the Ionian Sea, including the Zakynthos island, which has become a cause célèbre because of the conflicts there between local tourism development and the nesting beaches for turtles. It is monitoring, with the help of local fishermen, the movements of individual animals to ascertain where the problems lie. Options for the future development of tourism in ways which will dovetail with the requirements of the seals and turtles, i.e. application of the principles of the Fifth Environmental Action Programme, are also being examined. Where necessary, direct action to protect turtle eggs and nests, such as the purchase of important nesting sites, are undertaken.

The most important part of the project in terms of hoped-for effects is a

campaign to inform the local authorities, fishermen, tourist industry, foreign and domestic visitors and the local public in general about the significance of the monk seals and loggerheads and about the possible actions each individual can take to reduce the pressure on these animals. The project thus clearly recognises that local community awareness and goodwill is the sine qua non of any successful long-term conservation.

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