

SEA TURTLES IN KEFALONIA



Kefalonia is home to two of the seven sea turtle species that exist in the world. Loggerhead sea turtles, also known as *Caretta caretta*, nest and forage on the island's south coast, while Green sea turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) are rarely seen and only forage on the island's sea grass meadows. Both species migrate across the Mediterranean Sea to find food or warmer waters to spend the winter. After the initial "lost years" of their lives, they become reproductively mature when they reach around 17 to 25 years of age. The loggerheads return to Kefalonia, where they once hatched as baby turtles, every two to three years to reproduce.

They begin mating from late March until early June, while they are still offshore or as soon as they approach the nesting beaches. A female turtle will mate with several different males, and as a result her nests can contain eggs fertilized by up to five different fathers.



The nesting season begins in early June and continues until mid-August. One female turtle can lay up to five nests within one season, and each nest has around 90 eggs. To lay their nests, female turtles emerge on the nesting beach during the night. They crawl to the back of the beach looking for soft sand with just the right moisture to lay their eggs. They dig a 50 cm deep eggchamber using only their back flippers and begin laying their eggs. The eggs have the size and shape of a ping-pong ball. The shell is soft, so the eggs don't break as they fall into the eggchamber. This procedure can take up to two hours. Sea turtles are easily scared and must not be disturbed while they are trying to nest.

Loggerheads can grow to over 1 m long, and can weigh up to 100 kg. They mostly eat jellyfish, squid, crabs and other crustaceans, sea urchins, and mussels. They are not fast enough to catch fish, but turtles in the harbour of Argostoli do eat them when tourists or fishermen throw them in the water. They often confuse small pieces of plastic or shopping bags for food and swallow them. This can block their digestive tract and is a common cause of death.



With a prolonged maturity period, a small increase in mortality rates can cause a fast reduction of their population, as very few turtles survive to their reproductive age. All species of sea turtles are threatened by extinction. Their numbers are declining due to high mortality caused by trawling and longline fishing, as well as plastic, metal, and chemical pollution in the sea. Their natural habitats are degraded by marine and coastal development. All sea turtle species are classified as endangered and are protected by Greek and European law, and active research and conservation programmes are critical for their survival.

WHO IS WILDLIFE SENSE?

We are a sea turtle research and conservation organization based on the island of Kefalonia, Greece. Our mission is to protect the endangered sea turtles of Kefalonia and their natural habitats, and to promote public awareness. We are joined by local and international volunteers from all over the world who join our efforts every year. You can see our teams at work on the nesting beaches and at the harbour of Argostoli.

WHERE TO SEE THE TURTLES



If you want to see the sea turtles of Kefalonia, the best thing to do is to set aside a morning to visit the harbour in Argostoli. Argostoli is the capital of the island and there are several cafes to choose from for a nice coffee and a walk by the water. Here you'll see several locals buying fresh produce from the markets and stopping at the harbour to purchase some fresh fish. These fishermen dock here every day year-round and sell their catch while sifting through their nets and discarding fish they don't particularly want.

The sea turtles take advantage of this by circling the docked fishing vessels and feeding off the discard. Typically sea turtles are not fast enough to catch fish and mainly stick to eating slower creatures like jellyfish, but when the chance arises to eat fish with little effort, they won't pass it up! You'll also find the turtles feeding on the mussels growing on the side of the harbour wall. These mussels are rich in calcium and are readily available. We do ask, as tempting as it may be, that you do not feed the turtles as they are wild creatures and they must maintain their natural feeding abilities.

You may be wondering about the blue markings on the turtle's shells (carapace). This does not occur naturally and is created by them intentionally rubbing up against the docked fishing boats. This behaviour allows them to remove excess fauna, like barnacles, that have attached to them over time.

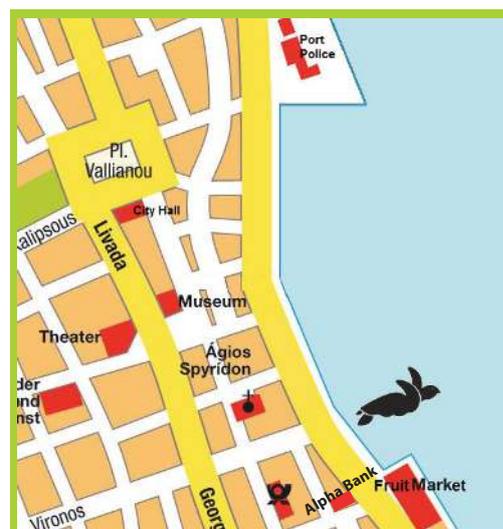
Every day from late May through September our researchers are stationed along the harbour to conduct visual health examinations, making sure all turtles are free of hooks and have no other abnormalities, in addition to recording their social interactions with each other. By nature, sea turtles are not social creatures,

which makes the harbour a unique environment where they interact frequently. Annually, we record around 30 different individuals, with some just paying a short visit and others staying all year-round. Look for our researchers in blue researcher shirts walking along the harbour and they'll be happy to answer any questions you may have!

Occasionally you may also see our team taking a turtle out of the water. We do this only when a turtle is injured and must be closely examined. We do try to deal with most of the injuries on-site, but when necessary the sea turtles are taken to the Rescue Centre in Athens.



The harbour of Argostoli is the best place to see the turtles swimming and basking in the sun.



ARGOSTOLI HARBOUR

We suggest you visit the harbour between **8:00 am and 12:30 pm** as most of the turtles leave after noon when the fishing boats leave. You will most likely spot 3 to 4 loggerhead sea turtles swimming around the fishing boats that dock right across from the Alpha Bank and next to the Rock Cafe and fruit markets.

MEET THE SEA TURTLES



MEET A FEW OF THE TURTLES IN THE ARGOSTOLI HARBOUR

Barb is one of the most well-known and easily identified sea turtles in the harbour. She is one of the few that stays here for most of the year. She acts like the head honcho of the harbour bossing every other turtle around and guarding the fishing boats that toss the best scraps from their nets. Barb loves being the subject of everyone's photos and will often be seen swimming right up against the harbour wall. An interesting fact about Barb is that she nests in Zakynthos, not here in Kefalonia!

Ways to recognize Barb:

- Clear boat strike wound on her carapace
- A red plastic tag on her rear flipper
- One of the largest females in the harbour



Artemis was first identified by Wildlife Sense in 2013 and has been seen in the harbour ever since, even in the winter time when other sea turtles normally migrate to warmer waters! She was first spotted in 2013 with a fishing line coming out of her cloaca, indicating that she had swallowed a fishing hook and it was still lodged inside her intestines. She was taken to the Rescue Centre in Athens and released in Athens once she passed the line. From Athens, she then swam back to the Argostoli Harbour where she clearly feels she belongs under our watchful eyes. Artemis is a fast swimmer who also likes to be in charge...when Barb is not in sight!

Ways to recognize Artemis:

- A blue plastic tag on her rear flipper



Bulbious is one of the larger males in the harbour. He was first identified by Wildlife Sense in 2013 and is mainly seen in the harbour during summertime. He swims with ease, but do not let that fool you as he is extremely fast and stealthy. When he isn't swimming along the harbour wall, he can be seen floating on the sea surface basking in the summer sun. Bulbious was treated in 2014 for a large cyst on his neck that was found to be a persistent bacterial infection.

Ways to recognize Bulbious:

- Several large deep boat strikes along his carapace
- He has a "bubble" on the anterior portion of his carapace where he was struck by a boat and the shell reformed with a pocket of air inside.
- The rear portion on his carapace is disfigured due to damage from a boat



WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?



It is important not to feed or touch the harbour sea turtles. Please keep in mind that despite their friendly nature they are wild creatures and they must be capable of searching for their own food.



Lights can deter nesting sea turtles and disorient little hatchlings, so please do not use torches or make fires on the beach. If you find a hatchling that has lost its way, please contact us immediately.



Remove abandoned sand castles and fill in holes on the beach. Nesting turtles and hatchlings can fall into the holes or become entrapped in sand sculptures.



Be mindful of any sea turtle activity on the beaches. If you see a nesting turtle or hatchling crawling to the sea, please do not disturb them and keep your distance. If they are in need of help please contact us immediately.

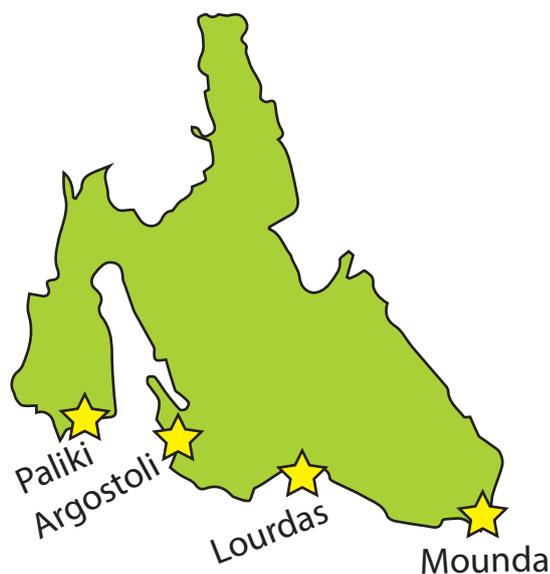


Place umbrellas and beach equipment on moist sand and away from the back of the beach where sea turtles often nest. Make sure to take all items you brought to the beach back home with you including any rubbish you may have created and any you find along the beach.

NESTING BEACHES IN KEFALONIA

Sea turtles lay their nests on several beaches along the south coast of Kefalonia. Their eggs need warm, moist sand to incubate. Moundas and Skala in the south-east, Lourdas bay, Avithos, Ai Chelis, Ammes, Megali Ammos and Makris Gialos near Argostoli, and Megas Lakkos near Lixouri are some of the most important nesting beaches on the island.

The nests incubate for about 55 days. Then, groups of hatchlings emerge during the night. They use the horizon's ambient night glow to find the sea, and light pollution can disorient them. Those that make it swim to the open sea, and only one in a thousand will make it into adulthood and return to Kefalonia to reproduce.



CONTACT US

If you would like more information please visit our website at <http://wildlifesense.com> or contact us directly at (+30) 698 4865941 or kefalonia@wildlifesense.com