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**PROCEEDINGS OF THE SIXTEENTH ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM ON
SEA TURTLE BIOLOGY AND CONSERVATION**

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THE SEA TURTLE HOSPITAL AS A TOOL FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

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The Sea Turtle Protection Society of Greece (STPS) conducts an Environmental Education Programme since 1986. The Programme is carried out either by STPS presenters visiting the schools or by the teachers themselves after borrowing a portable module, especially designed by the STPS (Kremezi-Margaritouli, 1992). Each year more than 500 presentations are conducted at schools throughout Greece. The Programme presents the sea turtle as a symbol of the vanishing wildlife in Greece, contributing positively to conservation efforts.

Every year, several sea turtles are found stranded along the shoreline of Greece. Reports of strandings seem to increase from year to year, apparently due to the increased awareness level of the public and the authorities. In 1991, a Sea Turtle Rescue Network was launched by the STPS.

After some preparatory actions, cooperation has been established with the Port Police stations and Fisheries Departments around Greece. All sea turtle strandings that come to the knowledge of the above agencies are reported to the STPS.

The ever increasing number of turtle strandings and the growing public demand for prompt and appropriate collection, treatment and rehabilitation of the injured or sick animals, made apparent the need for the creation of a Sea Turtle Hospital in Greece.

The greater Athens area was selected as the desired location of the turtle hospital, mainly because of the availability of public transportation means that would carry turtles from various parts of Greece. An STPS proposal was promptly accepted by the Municipality of Glyfada, a large seaside peripheral town, about 20 km from Athens centre.

Two old train wagons, donated by the State Railways, were repaired and installed on seaside land provided by the Municipality. Three polyethylene tanks, one of 5-m diameter and two of 2-m, were constructed in situ and are functioning with a continuous flow of seawater through a system of pumps and filters. One train wagon was transformed to an exhibition area where visitors and especially children would see a photographic display and attend a slide projection. The Hospital is open to the public since 5, June 1995, there is no admission fee and accepts organized groups of people and school children for a guided presentation.

Although not yet completely finished, the Turtle Hospital receives and treats injured or sick turtles since the beginning of 1995. During 1995, 84 turtles were reported dead and 29 injured from various parts of Greece. Of the injured turtles, 23 were brought to the Hospital. Turtles were treated by experienced volunteers under the supervision of a veterinarian; 12 of the 23 animals were released after their treatment, 10 died, and 1 is still under treatment. Rehabilitated animals were released preferably at the locations where they were collected.

From the turtles that were brought to the Hospital, 5 bore injuries inflicted deliberately by humans, presumably fishermen. It must be noted that 7 turtles (of the 23 brought to the Hospital) were found by fishermen who then reported to the Port Authorities.

The Turtle Hospital is an ideal place for sensitizing children. Also, it triggers the social need for active participation in nature conservation and care for animals. We organized, with the approval of the Ministry of Education, guided visits of groups of schoolchildren. Groups consist of no more than 25 children to be tight enough and fit in the small space of the exhibition and the facilities.

Up to the end of 1995, more than 35 school visits have been effected at the Hospital and about 1,000 pupils from the wider Athens area have been awarded. Children are impressed by the turtles and the turtles become angry with people that might deliberately hurt them.

The Sea Turtle Hospital in Greece, besides its main role in the rehabilitation of injured turtles, contributes to public awareness and especially to younger generations.

Much of the work done at the Hospital was carried out by volunteers whom we would like to thank.

LITERATURE CITED

Kremezi-Margaritouli, A. 1992. Sea turtles stimulate environmental education in Greece. *Marine Turtle Newsletter* 57:21-22.