

DERMOCHELYS CORIACEA STRANDINGS ON THE NORTH AFRICAN COAST IN THE STRAIT OF GIBRALTAR *

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Leatherback turtles are, among all the marine turtles, undoubtedly the most mysterious; so every data point related with this species always draws remarkable scientific interest. That is why any stranding or sighting of this specie becomes such an important event for the scientific community. The main opportunity to study *Dermochelys coriacea* properly is with females on the nesting beaches, but this is still insufficient since males are excluded.

In the last two decades, the North African shores of the Strait of Gibraltar (both Morocco and Ceuta) have experienced an unusual number of strandings (even a massive one) and an unusual seasonal distribution pattern. In this presentation we provide information to contribute to the overall knowledge of the migration behavior of these turtles in our geographical context and also some insight into causes of mortality.

During the seasons when jellyfishes occur in the form of "blooms", the number of turtles increases, often traveling together, as can be deduced from two mass strandings, one of them with 11 turtles (García y Chamorro, 1984), and several observations of traveling groups across the Strait of Gibraltar (Salvador, 1985). This suggests a trophic migration and indicates how important the benthopelagic ecosystem is for the feeding ecology of turtles in general and the leatherback in particular.

With regard to mortality, trawling nets and fixed arrowhead fish traps are easily the main causes for turtle loss (Ocaña y De los Ríos, 2002) which can be minimized by a conservation plan where by the nets are monitored and cleared on a daily basis.

Bibliography

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