

Critical green turtle habitats identified in Mediterranean

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Geopolitical instability across the region may cause delays to the successful implementation of new conservation measures. Credit: Peter Richardson

A new study led by the University of Exeter has identified two major foraging grounds of the Mediterranean green turtle and recommends the creation of a new Marine Protected Area (MPA) to preserve the vulnerable species.

The researchers tracked green turtles from [breeding grounds](#) in Cyprus, Turkey, Israel and Syria to provide the most comprehensive set of distribution data ever assembled for the species in the Mediterranean.

The study, published today in the journal *Diversity and Distributions*, identifies ten foraging grounds, with two major hotspots in Libya accounting for more than half of the turtles which were tracked to conclusive endpoints.

Professor Brendan Godley of the Centre for Ecology and Conservation at the University of Exeter, the paper's senior author, said: "We know where the major nesting grounds are but a robust understanding of where [marine turtles](#) go during migration and foraging phases is crucial to the development of effective conservation strategies. Of the two key habitats identified in this study - the Gulf of Bomba and the Gulf of Sirte - only the former is currently recognised as a biodiversity hotspot. The protection of both would benefit a high proportion of the adult [green turtle](#) population in the Mediterranean."

The species has suffered extreme declines in the past due to heavy overharvesting under British administration during the 20th century for meat and turtle soup. Additionally, within the region, the magnitude of marine turtle bycatch - the unwanted fish and marine creatures trapped by commercial fishing - is considered unsustainable by many conservationists who call for urgent action.

In this latest study, 34 female green turtles were satellite tracked from breeding grounds for a total of 8,521 tracking days between 1998 and 2010.

Dr Kim Stokes, lead author, added: "Although this study has led to a quantum leap in our knowledge of the species in the Mediterranean, there is clearly an urgent need to extend the tracking to some of the other

major nesting beaches in Eastern Turkey and Cyprus to ensure we fully map the major migratory corridors and foraging grounds."

Provided by University of Exeter

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