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Dipkarpaz School Children Learn to SAVE Our Turtles – Our Endangered Neighbours

Over 75 school children became “Turtle Biologists for a Day” and learned first hand what it’s like to work with and protect endangered sea turtles that visit Cyprus. Fourth and fifth year students from Dipkarpaz Primary School spent the morning of September 20th exploring the nesting behaviors of Loggerheads and Green Turtles, identifying turtle tracks, seeing egg chambers, and identifying threats to the turtles. The event was led by Monica Aureggi, international turtle conservation expert from the SAVE Project and members of the Turtle Monitoring and Conservation Team based in Dipkarpaz. Teachers also joined in the day’s activities.

The beautiful beaches of Cyprus are regular nesting areas for these two endangered species of marine turtles, the Loggerhead and Green Turtles. Both species face an uncertain future both here and around the world because of human activity on or near nesting beaches.

Because humans pose the most direct threat to these wonderful creatures and their habitats, every resident and visitor to Cyprus has a role to play in conserving and protecting them. As part of the effort to protect marine turtles in Cyprus, this “Be Turtle Biologists for a Day” event was organized by the Supporting Activities that Value the Environment (SAVE) project, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). It was held at the Ayphylon Beach.

Ms. Aureggi stated that “children are the first contact to develop awareness in the local community. You can tell them why turtles are important for Cyprus and they understand immediately and they take that message home to their parents”. She is an international turtle expert and president of a conservation NGO registered in Italy that works in the Mediterranean and Thailand.

Ms. Aureggi explained that while marine turtles spend most of their lives in the water, their very existence depends on beaches. Beaches provide females a place to dig nests and lay eggs. Hatchlings are born on the beach and then make their way to the sea.

Turtle Monitoring and Conservation Team members explained that conservation groups and local authorities are working together to protect turtle nesting sites by placing mesh wire cages over nests for protection. Clean up events have also been held to remove trash and debris from nesting areas.

Turtle Monitoring and Conservation Team members emphasized that everyone has a role to play in protecting our turtles. Children learned that during the nesting season (May-October), nesting beaches should be avoided at night. All litter should be picked up from the beach and disposed of properly in bins. They should not light campfires on the beach, should obey any posted warning signs, and should keep vehicles off nesting beaches. Hatchlings should not be collected or carried. If visitors dig sand castles, they should fill in the holes when they leave the beach. Finally, children learned that they should not touch or dig in areas marked by the turtle monitoring and conservation teams and they should not camp on the beach. All of these tips will help protect marine turtles now and in the future.

The Supporting Activities that Value the Environment (SAVE) Project, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development, works to build local capacity to better protect and manage Cyprus' valuable natural and cultural resources. SAVE is also dedicated to the ongoing protection efforts of marine turtles in Cyprus.



Students from Dipkarpaz measuring turtle tracks to identify whether its a Loggerhead or a Green Turtle.



Students identifying threats to sea turtles during the "BE A TURTLE BIOLOGIST FOR A DAY" event at Ayphylon Beach.



Monica Aureggi from SAVE explaining turtle behaviours to 4th & 5th grade students from Dipkarpaz.



Monica Aureggi demonstrating releasing hatchlings to the sea

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