

BAY OF BISCAY AND NORTH EAST ATLANTIC SEA TURTLES CONFERENCE CONCLUSIONS

On the 14-15th November 2008 a workshop organized by the Observatory of Herpetology (Herpetology department) of the Aranzadi Society of Sciences, gathered a range of researchers and stakeholders from different European Nations at the Aquarium of San Sebastian (Basque Country, Spain) to discuss the conservation and research objectives for marine turtles in the north-eastern Atlantic.

Sixteen oral presentations from Ireland to Cape Verde, included the French Atlantic coast, the Iberian Peninsula and the islands of Portugal and Spain plus a by-catch case-study from Uruguay demonstrated the importance of Europe's Atlantic fringe for marine turtles, highlighting a number of exceptional opportunities to investigate key questions in the open-ocean and coastal seas. For example, this geographical area provides foraging grounds for the oceanic-pelagic stage of several species and encompasses the third largest nesting rookery of loggerhead turtles in the world (Cape Verde Islands). At the conclusion of the workshop a list of research and conservation priorities was produced by the combined researchers, NGOs and government bodies under an overall objective of further integrating sea turtles into the European Marine Strategy. Although only provisional, and subject to further review, these priorities fall may be summarized as follows:

1. To work towards a public database for at-sea sightings and stranding of marine turtles in the NE Atlantic.
2. To ascertain the present threat to migrating and developing sea turtles posed by open-ocean fisheries.

3. To quantify the importance of the Bay of Biscay as a foraging ground for migrating leatherback turtles.

4. To standardize protocols for estimating sex ratios throughout the NE Atlantic, and investigating the disparity between indirect estimates from nesting beaches and direct observations of pelagic juveniles.

5. To consider the potential threat to key rookeries (such as Cape Verde) posed by global sea level rise.

6. To investigate the foraging ecology of pelagic juvenile loggerhead turtles around southerly Atlantic islands.

7. To increase international collaborations between NGO's, academic institutions and government stakeholders throughout the wider NE Atlantic region.

8. In terms of public awareness, it was additionally decided that, politicians, stakeholders and public in general should be made aware of the main threats to marine turtles, i.e., we need to translate what we know into common language regarding how important turtles are in the NE Atlantic.

All the participants left San Sebastian with the collective commitment to work closer together and to develop future priority initiatives in order to improve knowledge and contribute to marine turtle conservation in this area. At times of global climate change and habitat loss, the salient point to emerge from the meeting was that 'together we are in a position to make a contribution globally to understand marine turtles ecology'.

NEASTG
North East Atlantic Sea Turtle Group.
17th November 2008



Fig. 1.- Invited lectures to the Bay of Biscay and North East Atlantic sea turtles conference (left to right): Florence Dell'Amico, Jonathan Houghton, Mari Luz (Argi) Parga, Claudia Delgado, Amalia Martínez de Murguía, Thomas K. Doyle, Nagore Zaldúa-Mendizabal, Ana Liria-Loza, Elena Abella, Raúl Castro, Martín Laporta (Negro), Pierre Morinière & Josep M. Alonso. Xabier Murelaga was also invited lecture but had to leave before take this picture. Photography: Aitziber Egaña-Callejo