

SEA TURTLES RECOVERED AT THE WILD FAUNA RECOVERY CENTER IN GRAN CANARIA (CANARY ISLANDS, SPAIN)

Pascual Calabuig¹, Ana Liria Loza¹, and Luis F. López-Jurado²

1 Wild Fauna Recovery Center, Tafira Alta, Gran Canaria, Canary islands (Spain)

2 Instituto Canario de Ciencias Marinas, Carretera Melenara s/n, Telde, 35200 Las Palmas, Canary islands (Spain)

Abstract

Since the beginning of the 1990's, the Wild Fauna Recovery Center in Gran Canaria (Canary Islands, Spain) has received a large number of injured animals for recovery. Apart from birds and mammals, a considerable number of sea turtles representing different species are gathered each year. During the last five years (1999-2003), more than 100 turtles were sheltered annually; more than 80% successfully recovered and were released. The vast majority of turtles received at the center (roughly 98%) are loggerheads (*Caretta caretta*), almost all of them juvenile or subadult individuals. To a lesser extent, other species are also represented: adult leatherbacks (*Dermochelys coriacea*), juvenile green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*), and a few juvenile hawksbills (*Eretmochelys imbricata*). The main causes of turtle harm are fishing activities (e.g. entangled animals, ingested hooks) or direct wounding by humans. Other causes of damage are those related to marine pollution, such as ingestion of fuel, plastic debris, and so on. Finally, there are also natural causes, such as shark attacks, various diseases, anemia, flotation disorders, etc. The high number of sea turtles gathered at the Recovery Center clearly show the importance of this area (Canary Islands) for sea turtles in general, and especially for pelagic loggerheads migrating in the North Atlantic Ocean, which is a prime development habitat.