

# Sea turtle conservation

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ARCHELON – The Sea Turtle Protection Society of Greece

Established in 1983, ARCHELON- the Sea Turtle Protection Society of Greece aims to protect the sea turtles of Greece and their habitats. They do this through a number of conservation activities that have been tested and developed through the years. They support conservation in action and the data they collect contributes to the solution of problems that threatens sea turtles. Members of ARCHELON participate in the IUCN/Marine Turtle Specialist Group and contribute to the formulation of the international strategy for the conservation of sea turtles. ARCHELON collaborates closely with state agencies, the local authorities, institutions, other NGOs, fishermen and local inhabitants in order to mitigate and reverse population reduction of sea turtles.

ARCHELON's conservation efforts rely heavily on voluntary participation. Every year over 500 volunteers from all over the world join the projects for the conservation of nesting beaches and the operation of the Rescue Centre.

The project I was part of this summer was in Western Greece and had two different focus areas. The first half of my volunteering was in Preveza, a small town in Western Greece where there is little information about sea turtles nesting in this area. ARCHELON only began the seasonal recording of reproductive activity of sea turtles here in 2017. The main activity here was morning survey of the beaches. This entailed waking up at 5am every morning and walking the beaches (15km or so) in search of nests and any turtle tracks. If a nest was found we would have to record all relevant information such as location, distance from sea etc. We would have to mark it with a tripod and inform locals not to interfere. Each morning we would go back and check each nest to look for any disturbance. We also had public awareness shifts where we would set up an information kiosk in local towns and provide vital information to locals and tourists about the welfare of the sea turtles. Other duties I had whilst there was driving the Archelon vehicle, overseeing basecamp duties such as cooking and cleaning and I was also put in charge of the team when the field leader was away.



The second half of my project was in Amvrakikós Bay, located in the Ionian Sea in north-western Greece. ARCHELON in recent years has confirmed a significant presence of turtles in the region, the ARCHELON project in the Amvrakikós Bay aims to collect data on the population of sea turtles living in the area. This included going out on the boat every day to track, capture, identify, tag and release turtles directly back into the sea. This was very physical work as we

had to work as quickly and gently with the turtles as we could. Working out on the boat, catching the turtles and working in such close proximity with them was the most enriching, exciting and inspiring experience.

My month volunteering in Greece has taught me so many valuable life lessons as well as being one of the most enjoyable and unforgettable experiences. Working long hours in extremely hot weather and in a completely new environment has proven my resilience and perseverance. We had to deal with some stressful situations, such as dealing with a stranded turtle, where I had to think on my feet and solve problems quickly and adapt to the unexpected conditions. Good communication skills were key in this project as we had to overcome the language barrier to communicate with the locals and give them important information about the safety of the turtles. The group I was working with was made up of 3 other girls and we worked together as a team amazingly, creating lifelong friendships. It also gave me a chance to improve my leadership skills as I was put in charge of important tasks such as driving, weekly food shopping and leading the public awareness shifts. Although volunteering abroad seemed daunting at first it was the best decision I have ever made, my self-confidence has grown massively. I had the best summer of my life whilst learning valuable life skills and improving my chances of employment.

