

Sea Turtle Conservation, Greece

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With the help of the University of Liverpool Travel Bursary I got the opportunity to volunteer with a turtle conservation organisation, called Wildlife Sense, on the Greek island of Kefalonia. My two weeks involved learning about and then educating others on Loggerhead turtle activities, behaviours and the obstacles they face as a species.

My mornings normally started with a 'harbour shift', which involved monitoring adult turtles that were feeding and interacting in the local harbour. As well as monitoring and looking for injured turtles, our main concern was about educating the tourists. As the harbour becomes busy with fishing boats in the morning, turtles know that they are going to be fed by the fishermen. Although we weren't allowed to tell the fishermen off for feeding the turtles (as to maintain a good relationship with the locals), we tried to discourage tourists from feeding the turtles food such as fish and bread and it is the equivalent of a human eating a large McDonalds meal. Before I started volunteering I, and I'm sure many others, assumed that fish were a part of a turtles diet, however, they mainly eat bivalves and sea grass. Educating as many people as we could about key problems like feeding was one of the most important and rewarding parts of the trip.

For me, the most exciting part of my time volunteering with Wildlife Sense was the 'hatchling rescue' shifts. This involved sleeping on the beaches and helping any hatchlings get to sea. Minimal interference is best, however, with so many beaches having bright lights from beach bars and hotels, sometimes the hatchlings get slightly confused. The confusion occurs as hatchlings normally head straight towards the brightest light they see - this is normally moonlight reflecting on the sea - however, due to humans developing on beaches, hatchlings often head off in the wrong direction. Hatchling rescue shifts are key as without our help, hatchlings can easily get lost and end up baking in the sand when the sun comes up. Over 2 weeks I personally helped over 70 hatchlings make it to sea, with the total of the whole group being in the hundreds. Although this sounds like a larger number, only 1 in 1000 turtles make it to adulthood, yet another reason why conservation projects like this is so important.



Wildlife Sense is on a mission to protect endangered Loggerhead turtles and their natural habitats, while offering an incredible and unique volunteer experience. The whole Wildlife Sense team were very enthusiastic and knowledgeable as well as being friendly and welcoming. If you want to find out more about Wildlife Sense, check out their website, I couldn't recommend them enough.

<https://wildlifesense.com/en/>



My time in Greece helped me consider new career ideas as well as what I want to look into more while I'm still at university. This experience, combined with an ecology and conservation module I took in my first year, has made me consider conservation as a possible career idea. Learning about the obstacles that Loggerhead turtles face has really encouraged me to read more about conservation efforts that are in place as well as what we can do to reduce our impact on their habitat. With only 1 in 1000 turtles making it to adulthood, conservation and education is more important than ever.