

Final Evaluation Report

| Your Details | |
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| Full Name | Cansu Ulusoy |
| Project Title | The Interaction of Turkey's Antalya Coastal Ecosystems with Wildlife Tourism: Neptune Grass and Green Sea Turtles |
| Application ID | 42538-1 |
| Date of this Report | 24 December 2024 |

1. Indicate the level of achievement of the project's original objectives and include any relevant comments on factors affecting this.

| Objective | Not achieved | Partially achieved | Fully achieved | Comments |
|--|--------------|--------------------|----------------|---|
| Monitoring the feeding habits of sea turtles | | | | The objective of monitoring the feeding habits of sea turtles has been successfully achieved. The study provided detailed documentation of the turtles' dietary preferences and the impacts of wildlife tourism on these behaviors, generating valuable data. The effects of feeding activities by tourists on natural behaviors were recorded. Collaboration with local authorities and effective financial support significantly contributed to the successful implementation of the project. |
| Identify and photograph sea turtle injuries via diving sessions | | | | The objective of identifying and photographing sea turtle injuries was successfully achieved. Dive sessions allowed for observations of turtles in their natural habitats and the documentation of injuries. The collected photographs provided valuable data for analyzing the types and severity of injuries. As part of the project, educational and awareness activities were conducted, highlighting the increased risks posed by human interactions and wildlife tourism. |
| Determine the resilience of <i>P. oceanica</i> beds against tourism- | | | | Field studies have analyzed the threats and resilience levels faced by these ecosystems. The data obtained highlight the |

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| induced impacts | | | | negative impacts of human interaction and tourism activities on <i>P. oceanica</i> meadows. Through educational and informational activities, awareness has been raised among the local community and the tourism sector. As a result, the issue has been covered in the media, raising significant public awareness about the conservation of <i>P. oceanica</i> meadows. |
| Map the <i>P. oceanica</i> beds in the region | | | | The project's goal of mapping <i>P. oceanica</i> meadows in the region has been successfully achieved. Using advanced Geographic Information Systems (GIS), the mapping revealed detailed information about the ecosystem's location, size, and health. The collected data provides a critical resource for monitoring local ecosystems and evaluating the impacts of tourism. Collaboration with local authorities ensured the effective execution of the mapping process and the preservation of this data. |
| Collect seafloor samples in order to determine the status of <i>P. oceanica</i> beds in the region | | | | The project's goal of collecting seabed samples to assess the condition of <i>P. oceanica</i> meadows in the region has been successfully achieved. The samples collected during fieldwork provide critical data for evaluating the ecosystem's health and biodiversity. Laboratory analyses have been directed to researchers at nearby universities, with results pending. |

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| | | | | <p>The effective use of technical equipment and collaboration with local authorities contributed to the success of the sampling process.</p> |
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2. Describe the three most important outcomes of your project.

a). The project revealed that damage to Posidonia meadows caused by anchor drops from tourism vessels represents a small part of a larger nationwide issue. Findings from the study area, combined with insights from other organizations conducting similar research, highlighted the destruction of Posidonia meadows along the Mediterranean coastline, particularly in the Antalya region. This issue gained media attention, leading to the publication of reports that raised awareness about the problem.

b). The project documented cases of sea turtles injured or killed due to rapid vessel traffic in nearshore areas by tourism and fishing boats. Photographic and video evidence of non-compliant boats and vessels operating in the area were reported to local authorities. This led to informing watersport and tour operators about the issue, and in collaboration with nature conservation and national park officials, necessary warnings were implemented. As a result, a reduction in vessel speeds and proximity to the shore were observed. However, this issue has not been fully resolved at its root.

c). Educational and awareness-raising activities were conducted for tourists, schools, and fishermen in and around the project area. During these sessions, reports were received of sea turtles biting people outside the project boundaries due to feeding activities. Upon investigation, it was documented that excessive feeding by tourists as part of wildlife tourism had caused behavioral changes in some sea turtles. In particular 2-3 turtles were observed to have localized in specific areas and were recorded biting tourists. These findings highlight the behavioral disturbances caused by human-induced feeding activities.

3. Explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled.

One of the main challenges encountered during the project was the extensive use of boats and speedboats in the area, which caused sea turtles to flee to other feeding grounds throughout the day. Wildlife tourism boats often dumped excessive food waste into the sea to attract turtles. When this method failed, they encouraged their clients to enter the water, further disturbing the habitat. This high level of activity not only drove the turtles away but also increased incidents of turtles biting people, either in alternative areas or within the same region.

To address these issues, awareness campaigns were conducted targeting tour operators, highlighting the ecological impact of their practices. Collaborative efforts

with local authorities aimed to regulate boat activities and minimize disturbances in key feeding areas. While these measures reduced some disturbances, the issue requires continuous monitoring and stricter enforcement for long-term improvement.

4. Describe the involvement of local communities and how they have benefitted from the project.

Various efforts were undertaken to enhance the participation of local communities and ensure they benefited from the project. Collaboration with local authorities provided them with the necessary data, strengthening communication networks and contributing to the more effective implementation of conservation measures in the region.

Discussions with organizations involved in wildlife tourism focused on informing them about ways to minimize their impact on the environment. As a result of these efforts, complaints from environmentally conscious tourists decreased. Additionally, awareness programs conducted in local schools provided students with knowledge about seagrass beds, sea turtles, and the surrounding ecosystem. These initiatives also helped instill a new perspective on environmental sustainability. Collectively, these activities increased the engagement of local communities while raising awareness about ecosystem protection.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Yes, I would like to continue this work because the issues in the region remain unresolved. The main focus of the project, wildlife tourism, continues to expand along Turkey's Mediterranean coastline. This ongoing trend results in the decline of seagrass meadows, an increase in injury and mortality rates among sea turtles, and a rise in human biting incidents caused by behavioral changes in these animals.

To ensure both sustainable tourism and a sustainable environment, it is vital to continue research and awareness-raising efforts. Such activities not only support the preservation of ecosystems but also promote a balanced coexistence between human activities and natural habitats, ensuring the long-term health and resilience of the region's biodiversity.

6. How do you plan to share the results of your work with others?

I plan to share the damage caused by wildlife tourism and tourism in general to marine ecosystems, as well as the proposed solutions to mitigate these damages, through various means. Firstly, I will develop and continue this project by collaborating with other scientists and relevant authorities. I aim to contribute to scientific research by collecting more data to examine the effects of tourism activities on the ecosystem in more detail.

Furthermore, I aim to raise awareness by sharing my findings with the public. In this regard, I will collaborate with media outlets to publish press releases and news articles and produce publications to raise awareness about the importance of environmental

issues. Additionally, I plan to prepare academic publications related to this project and publish my research in scientific journals, sharing it with academic circles interested in the topic. In this way, I aim to create a broader impact on sustainable environment and tourism, both locally and internationally.

7. Looking ahead, what do you feel are the important next steps?

Looking ahead, I believe the next important steps will be to expand the current project on a larger scale and share its results more effectively. First and foremost, I intend to continue gathering additional data and conducting fieldwork to examine the effects of wildlife tourism on marine ecosystems in more detail. This data will enable me to better understand the impacts of tourism on sea turtles and seagrass meadows and help me develop recommendations for sustainable tourism practices.

In this context, a key priority will be to develop strategies for preventing the destruction of seagrass meadows and continue conducting field studies to protect the habitat of green sea turtles. Monitoring breeding areas, creating effective conservation plans, and reducing human activities that threaten the ecosystem will be essential.

Additionally, addressing behavioural disorders in sea turtles, particularly the increase in biting incidents related to feeding behaviour due to wildlife tourism, is crucial. To prevent these incidents, raising awareness and strengthening educational efforts will be vital. I plan to work closely with local authorities and the tourism sector to develop practical solutions that minimize the negative impacts of wildlife tourism on these ecosystems.

Finally, my goal is to share the findings through scientific publications and media outreach, raising awareness on a larger scale about the importance of sustainable tourism and environmental conservation. This will be critical in fostering global understanding of the need to protect these valuable ecosystems. I plan to continue developing this project, grounded in the principles of sustainable environment and tourism, ensuring that these efforts contribute to the long-term protection of marine life and its habitats.

8. Did you use The Rufford Foundation logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the Foundation receive any publicity during the course of your work?

Yes, we provided t-shirts with the Rufford Foundation logo to the institutions and organizations overseeing the sites, as well as to volunteers involved in fieldwork. The logo was also included on presentation slides, brochures, posters and site signage. During this period, an interview discussing the species and the field was broadcast on national TV and shared on our website, where we acknowledged the Rufford Foundation's support. The Rufford Foundation's contribution will also be acknowledged in future publications and studies based on the research findings.

9. Provide a full list of all the members of your team and their role in the project.

Cansu Ulusoy (Team Leader): As the project leader, she played a key role in ensuring the successful implementation of the project, leveraging her experience in field research and training. Her leadership contributed to the smooth execution of all activities and facilitated collaboration among team members.

Fatih Polat: He played a key role in conducting training sessions and managing the project's budget, ensuring that all financial resources were utilized efficiently and that the team had the necessary skills and knowledge to carry out the project activities effectively. Additionally, having previously led a Rufford project, he provided valuable guidance and support based on his past experience.

Begüm Reyhan Gül: she contributed significantly to the education and awareness activities, particularly in the school education programs. She helped develop and deliver educational materials, ensuring that students gained a deeper understanding of the project's goals and the importance of environmental conservation.

Hikmet Buru: As a project team member, he played an active role in both fieldwork and awareness activities. He contributed to data collection and documentation, assisting with photography and diving activities. His efforts were instrumental in capturing crucial visual data and supporting the project's outreach initiatives.

Selma Köle: She played an active role in fieldwork and contributed to awareness-raising activities. She provided valuable support in data collection, making observations, and recording results. Additionally, she was involved in the preparation of project promotional materials, contributing to photography and documentation.

Underwater documentary filmmaker and director Tahsin Ceylan, who provided significant support in diving, underwater photography, mapping, and documentation, also captured detailed photographs and recorded the seagrass damage in the region. By expanding the scope of the project, he conducted additional dives in the Mediterranean region, making the impact of this degradation visible to the public and raising awareness about the protection of marine ecosystems.

Volunteers - Together with student volunteers who participated in the Sea Turtle Research, Monitoring and Conservation Project for EKAD, they provided support to the team leader in fieldwork, earned how to work in the field, distributed brochures and posters to local and foreign tourists, and provided them information about the species.

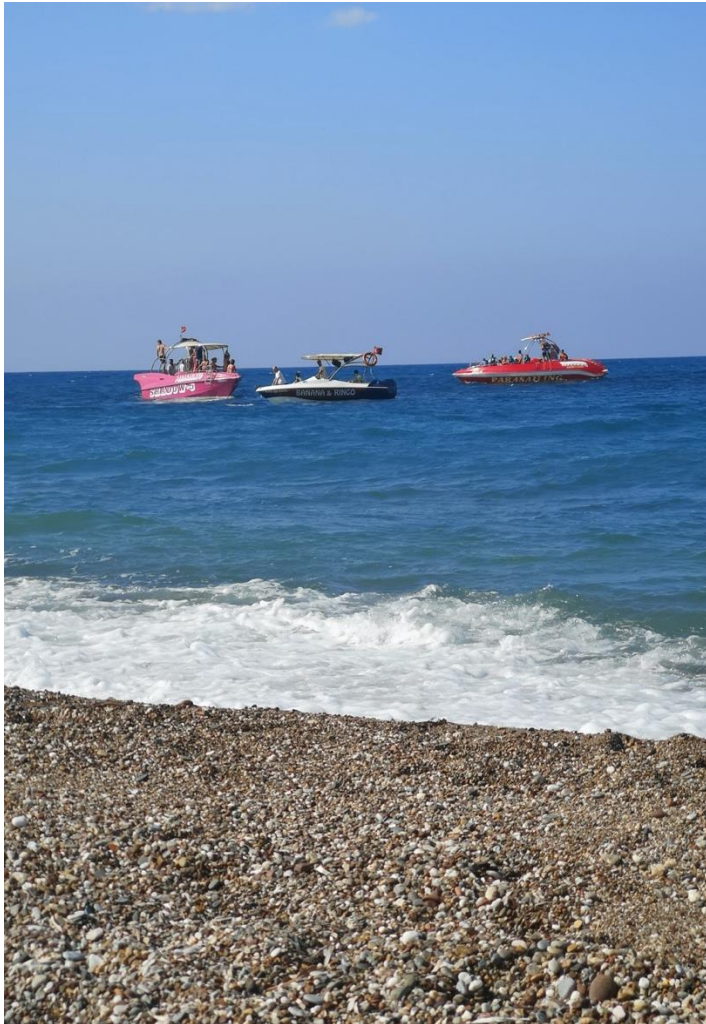
Dr. Bülent Gözcelioğlu also provided us with information on diving and scientific data collection.

10. Any other comments?

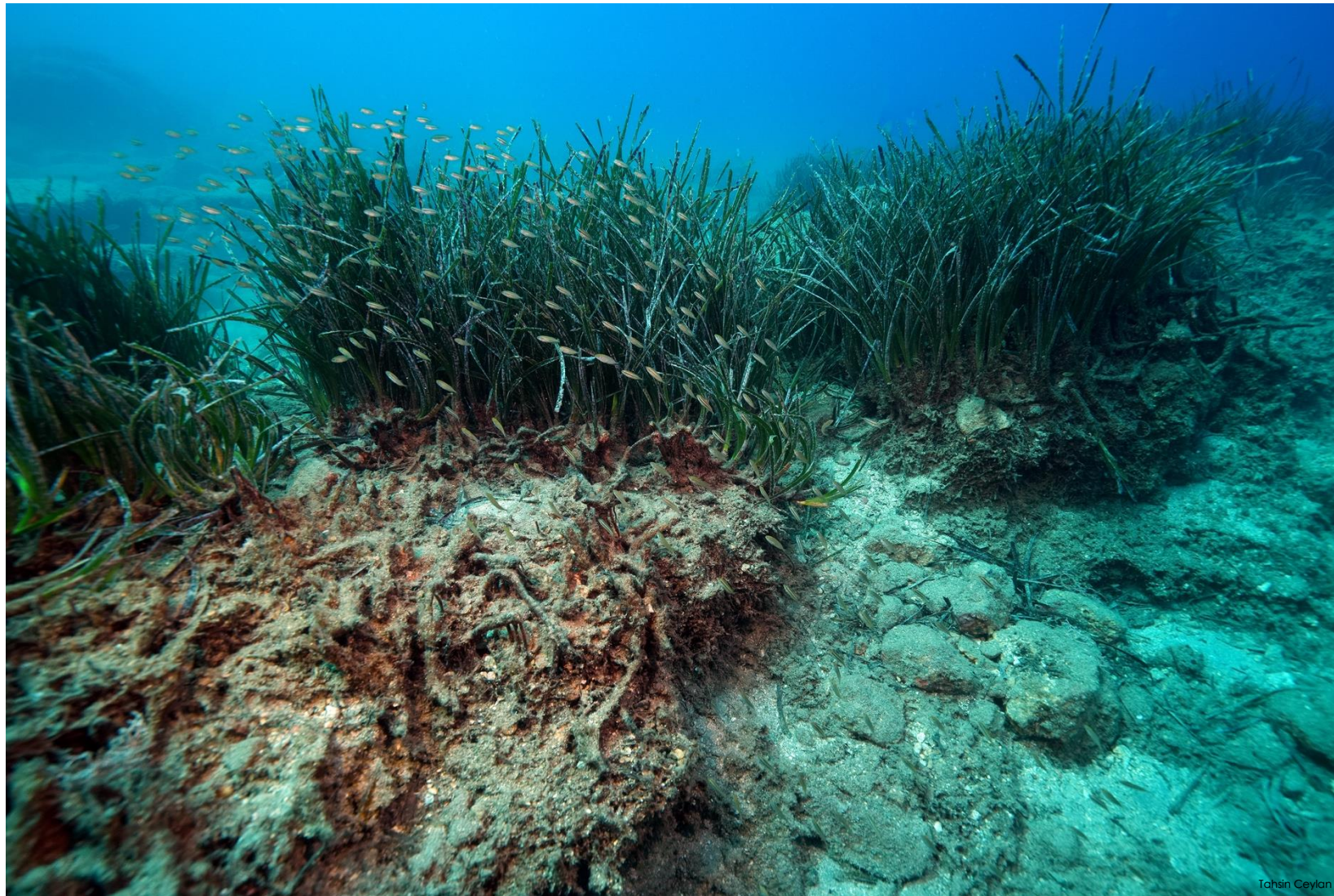
This project has not only allowed us to better understand the impacts of wildlife tourism on sea turtles and seagrass areas, but also highlighted the importance of collaboration between local authorities, the tourism sector, and the scientific community. Awareness-raising activities, data collection, and field studies have shown that there is a growing recognition of the need for sustainable tourism practices. Moving forward, strengthening partnerships and expanding educational activities to wider audiences will be of great importance. Additionally, the findings from this project will contribute both to the literature and to future conservation efforts, guiding new protection initiatives in the coming years. This project has further emphasized the significance of integrating scientific research with practical conservation efforts to safeguard marine biodiversity.













Tahsin Ceylan







YEŞİL DENİZ KAPLUMBAĞASI VE NEPTÜN OTU

Kaplumbağalar ve deniz çayırları, su altı yaşamının vazgeçilmez unsurlarıdır. Kaplumbağalar, beslenirken deniz çayırı gibi bitkilerle denge sağlarlar. Ancak, teknelerin çapa atması gibi tehditler, deniz çayırlarını etkileyebilir. Bu çayırları korumak, su altı ekosistemini sürdürülebilir kılmak açısından kritiktir.

Kaplumbağaların doğal beslenme döngüsüne müdahale edilmemelidir ve elle beslenmemelidir. Elle besleme, kaplumbağaların avlanma yeteneklerini zayıflatır ve stresle başa çıkamaları zorlaştırabilir.

Deniz kaplumbağalarına ve deniz çayırlarına saygı göstermek, doğal yaşam alanlarını korumak önemlidir. Doğayla uyum içinde yaşamak, sağlıklı bir gelecek için önemli bir adımdır.



**DENİZ KAPLUMBAĞALARINI
BESLEMEK YASAKTIR !**

**FEEDING
SEA TURTLES IS FORBIDDEN !**









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YASAM

Teknelerin çapaları "Akdeniz'in akciğerleri" deniz çayırlarına zarar veriyor

Antalya'da gezi teknelerinden atılan çapaların "Akdeniz'in akciğerleri" diye bilinen posidonya çayırlarına (deniz çayırı) zarar verdiği anlar su altından görüntülendi.

Süleyman Elçin | 14.08.2024 - Güncelleme : 14.08.2024



Fotoğraf: Tahsin Ceylan / AA

<https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/yasam/teknelerin-capalari-akdenizin-akcigerleri-deniz-cayirlarina-zarar-veriyor/3303411>

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