PHOTOESSAY

SEA TURTLES IN KUWAIT: A NEW TRACKING STUDY

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In a step considered the first of its kind at the national level, and as part of efforts to preserve wildlife and fulfil its obligations towards international conventions, the Environment Public Authority supervised release of two green sea turtles with satellite transmitters in August 2022. The project is carried out in cooperation with the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences, Kuwait University, Scientific Center Kuwait, Kuwait Environment Lens Team, and Senyar Dive Team.

The goals of the project are multifold. The first is to track the movements of green turtles identify their home ranges and inform development of integrated plans to protect their habitats as nature reserves. Another goal is to determine if human activities concentrated near nesting beaches changes use of the area by turtles and maybe drives them to nest on other beaches or other areas. Educating the public about sea turtles and their natural habitat is another project goal. Hence, the data will be used at local, regional, and international levels to conserve sea turtles and their habitats in accordance with Kuwait's commitments to international treaties on biodiversity.

This photoessay demonstrates the preparation for tracking the first two turtles under this new initiative. Both green turtles were rescued from water cooling tanks in the southern industrial area several months prior and sent to the Scientific Centre of Kuwait where they received veterinary care and were rehabilitated back to full health. Once deemed fully recovered and ready for release, the turtles were fitted with Wildlife Computers' Argos satellite tags (Figure 1). The turtles were then retained overnight to ensure they had adjusted to swimming with the tags on their carapaces.

The next day, in temperature-controlled environmental conditions, the turtles were moved to Qaruh Island for release (Figure 2 and 3). The turtles were released on the cooler sand, close to the water's edge (Figure 4) and immediately swam towards open waters (Figure 5). We hope to remotely track them for up to two years using the attached transmitters.

Figure 1. Turtles were equipped with satellite tags and had small sections of tissue sampled for genetic analyses while under the care and supervision of the Scientific Centre of Kuwait. (Photo credit: ALan F. Rees)

Figure 2. Assembling for the turtle release on Qaruh Island, southern Kuwait. (Photo credit: ALan F. Rees)

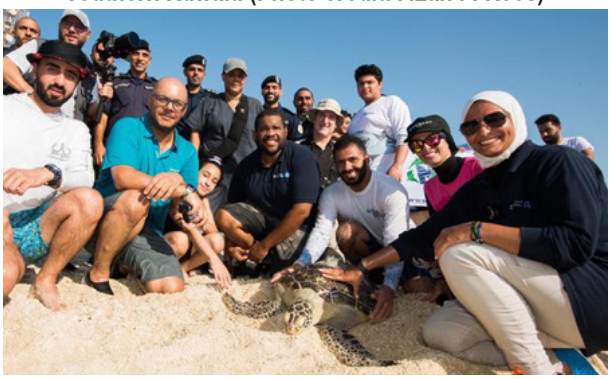

Figure 3. The project team, including representatives of the Kuwait Environment Public Authority, Kuwait University, the Scientific Center of Kuwait, the Coast Guard, and others, at the moment of release of the smaller of the two green turtles. (Photo credit: Senyar Dive Team)

Figure 4. A turtle's first encounter with the sea after several months of rehabilitation. (Photo credit: Senyar Dive Team)

Figure 5. The turtles wasted no time in returning to their natural habitats. (Photo credit: ALan F. Rees)

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