



ANNUAL ACTIVITY REPORT ZAKYNTHOS PROJECT

———— 2025 ————

Athens, November 2025

**ARCHELON, The Sea Turtle
Protection Society of Greece**



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1 INTRODUCTION

The **six nesting beaches of the Loggerhead** sea turtle (*Caretta caretta*) in Laganas Bay have been included in the site **GR2210002** "Kolpos Lagana Zakynthou (Akr. Geraki-Keri) kai nisides Marathonisi kai Peluso" of the European Natura 2000 network. In 1999 the beaches and marine area were included in the **National Marine Park of Zakynthos** (NMPZ), designated by a Presidential Decree (Government Gazette 906 D/22-12-99, Amendment: GOVERNMENT 1272/D/27-11-03).

The Management Agency (MA) of the NMPZ was established in 2000. In 2020 the management of all Protected Areas across Greece was transferred to a newly established central Agency, the Natural Environment and Climate Change Agency (NECCA). Thus today, the body responsible for the protection and management of the nesting habitats within the NMPZ is NECCA's **Management Unit (MU) of the National Parks of Zakynthos, Ainos and Protected Areas of the Ionian Islands**, based in Zakynthos.



2 RESULTS

ARCHELON's presence in Laganas Bay, Zakynthos, has been continuous since the early 1980s, carrying out research activities related to the recording and protection of sea turtle nesting, with systematic nest counts starting in 1984. Since the establishment of the NMPZ, ARCHELON has collaborated with the MU, sharing the data collected each year for the better management of the protected area.

ARCHELON's sea turtle conservation project in Zakynthos for 2025 season was successfully carried out by **100 volunteers/researchers** between May and October. According to preliminary data, **2,155 Loggerhead nests** were recorded and protected with the help of the MU. It should be noted that it has been the third consecutive year with a high number of nests (in 2023 and 2024 the recorded nests were 2,033 and 2,470 respectively), which gives a tone of optimism for the recovery of the Zakynthos population.



From the beginning of 2025 until October 5th, 28 incidents of sea turtle strandings were recorded. Of them, **25 were dead and 3 were injured turtles** that were immediately transferred to ARCHELON's Sea Turtle Rescue Centre for rehabilitation. Half of the strandings were found within the protected marine area of Laganas Bay. Examination of those stranded animals showed **interaction with fisheries** (in 3 cases), as well as signs of injuries caused by **boat collisions** (in 7 different cases).

Over **48,500 visitors and locals** learned about sea turtles and the threats they face through ARCHELON's public awareness activities. Said activities were carried out on the nesting beaches, in various hotel units, on specific tourist boats operating in the protected marine area of Laganas Bay, as well as at the ARCHELON Information Station located in the city of Zakynthos.

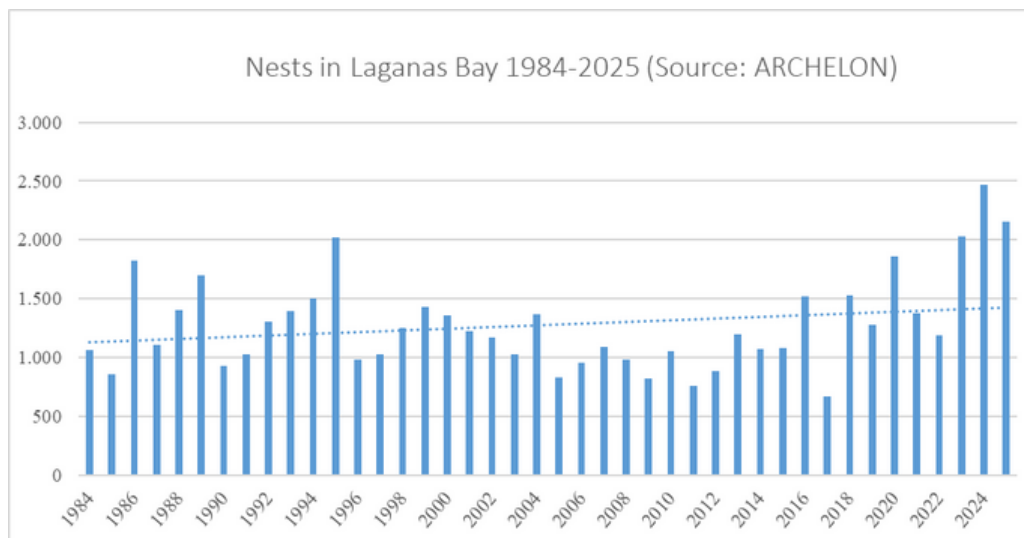


3 CONSERVATION

The MU implemented **security measures** and **surveillance patrols**, as well as partially **restricted access** to the nesting zone (with ropes) on the beaches of Laganas Bay. WWF Greece operated a **fire protection observatory** in the area behind Sekania beach.

ARCHELON's **systematic recording of sea turtle nests** in Laganas Bay is one of the longest-running conservation projects worldwide for this species. Taking into account the annual nesting records for the last 42 years (1984 – 2025), it can be concluded that the breeding population of the Loggerhead that nests in Laganas Bay is generally stable and keeps being one of the largest breeding populations in the Mediterranean. Strong annual fluctuations are observed, as well as an upward trend in recent years. This trend is entirely dependent on the continuation of the conservation measures that have been implemented over the years.

The MU's continuous presence on the beaches in combination with ARCHELON's great efforts in the summer of 2025 ensured the continuation of the long-term recording of sea turtle nesting and the protection of nests and hatchlings. However, basic issues of habitat protection and conservation remain unresolved, taking into account the high rate of non-compliance with protection measures.



Annual number of nests, as recorded by ARCHELON, and the corresponding linear trend for the 42-year period (1984-2025) in Laganas Bay, Zakynthos.

4 THREATS

Zakynthos has become a leading international tourist destination in the last 20 years. The number of tourist accommodations and businesses around the National Marine Park and on the entire island has multiplied. Accordingly, the number of visitors to the nesting beaches and to the turtle-watching boats has increased.

During the 2025 nesting season, many incidents of non-compliance with the applicable protection measures were recorded, both on land and at sea. Despite the fact that the MU's guards acquired the right to inspect and recommend fines within the National Marine Park (based on a legislative change in 2023), and despite the responsibilities of the Coast Guard and the Police to impose sanctions at sea and on beaches respectively, no fines were imposed in 2025. This was mainly due to the lack of daily presence of the competent authorities in the summer.



Specifically in the marine protected area, there were incidents of non-compliance with the PD recorded daily during the summer period: **vessels exceeding the speed limit** of 6 knots (Zones B and C), **non-compliance with the no-anchoring zone** (Zone B), and several incidents of **vessels entering restricted areas** (Zone A). Also, the Zakynthos Port Authority's rules for the proper observation of sea turtles were not followed. Since the current regulations do not set a limit on the number of boats allowed in Laganas Bay based on the carrying capacity of the marine protected area, a very large number of boats crowded in daily so that tourists can observe sea turtles, resulting in significant disturbance for the animals.

Non-compliance with the obligation to remove **beach furniture at night**, incidents of **human presence at night** on the beach, as well as **trampling of nests** by people entering the nesting zone were recorded on nesting beaches that are Protected Areas (except for Sekania, which is an Area of Absolute Protection and no human presence is allowed). Although the maximum limit of beach furniture was respected in 2024, in 2025 it was exceeded on Gerakas beach, where **167 sun loungers** were recorded (compared to the permitted 120).

Despite the MU's successful placement of wooden stakes to prevent their entry on the beach, cases of **vehicles and horses** on the sand dunes and the beach were also observed, with negative impacts on the habitat.

In addition, pressures from illegal activities with serious long-term impacts on the habitat continued for another year. These include the **illegal road** between Dafni and Gerakas beaches, the **unauthorized buildings/residences** in Gerakas and Dafni, some of which operate as illegal accommodation, catering and entertainment businesses. In fact, some of the businesses in Dafni proceeded with expansion/renovation in 2025, while there was even an attempt to connect them to the electricity network in June 2025. The local authorities have not implemented the existing administrative decisions for the demolition of these illegal structures.



Within the boundaries of the National Park there is an **overflowing landfill**. It has not been in operation since 2018, however, the area has not yet been restored by the Municipality and continues to pose a permanent threat of toxic pollution to the nesting beaches and the marine area. The European Court of Justice has condemned the Greek state for violations in this regard twice. Finally, on 9 October 2025, the Greek state was **fined 5.5 million euros** with an additional 12,500 euros for each day of non-compliance.

Marathonisi is included in Zone A2, where construction is completely prohibited according to the PD. However, in November 2024, the company owning Marathonisi obtained a **building permit** from the Zakynthos Building Service. Bulldozers were brought to the island in February 2025 and construction began immediately. ARCHELON, in collaboration with WWF Greece and MEDASSET, highlighted the risk of habitat degradation to all relevant authorities and the media. As a result, the Urban Planning Department suspended the permit. In addition, WWF Greece and MEDASSET filed a request for annulment of the building permit with the competent court. The case is still pending.

Finally, for another year, extensive **light pollution** from public and private light sources (which causes hatchling disorientation) was observed, as well as extensive **noise pollution** (which causes disturbance to adult sea turtles).



5 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Strengthening Security and Enforcement of Legislation

All existing pressures on the habitat and the protected species, both in the marine and terrestrial areas, must be addressed with adequate surveillance and proper legislation enforcement by the competent authorities (Coast Guard, Police, Management Unit).

5.2 Raising Awareness

An extensive awareness campaign for the local community, businesses and authorities will contribute decisively to the proper implementation of the legislation and the reduction of incidents of non-compliance.

5.3 Completing and Improving the Special Environmental Study for the Protected Areas

The Special Environmental Study (SES), as well as the accompanying Draft Presidential Decree (PD) and Management Plan (MP), must take into account the comments and suggestions submitted by environmental organizations like ARCHELON.

It is noted that the SES for the Protected Areas of the Ionian Islands (including Zakynthos) was put up for public consultation in January 2023, but this seemed to aim more at consolidating the existing situation rather than solving the problems and ensuring effective protection.

It is necessary that the State provides information regarding the expected completion time of the SES and its produced results (PD, MP), as well as whether the comments/suggestions of environmental organizations have been incorporated.



5.4 Implementing the National Action Plan for the Sea Turtle

The Action Plan, which was established in 2021 by Ministerial Decision, provides for the recording and protection of nests and hatchlings in Laganas Bay of Zakynthos as an action of high priority. However, to date, this action has been covered almost exclusively by ARCHELON resources. If the State continues not to support the implementation of the Action Plan in the region, a serious problem will arise since ARCHELON cannot continue to undertake such a high expenditure indefinitely.

5.5 Improving the Special Environmental Study for the Ionian Marine Park

Laganas Bay together with the neighboring Kyparissia Bay (Western Peloponnese) gather more than 57% of the loggerhead nests recorded within the European Union. The announcement by the Greek Government for the establishment of a large Marine Park in the Ionian Sea, which will include both areas, is a promising development for the long-term survival of the species. The relevant SES was put up for public consultation that concluded at the end of September 2025. ARCHELON participated in the consultation process and submitted proposals for improvements to the study, in order to ensure the good conservation status of the species and its habitat.



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