

## NEW RECORD OF A NESTING LOGGERHEAD TURTLE *CARETTA CARETTA* IN WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN

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The Loggerhead Turtle (*Caretta caretta*) is the commonest marine turtle living in the Mediterranean. Many observations and captures have been made in the Spanish Mediterranean coast as reported in the literature (see the review by Pascual, 1985). *Caretta caretta* has been reported to nest in several localities in the eastern Mediterranean: Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Libya, Israel and Egypt (see Dodd, 1988; Maigret 1986; Groombridge, 1990 and references therein). However, the nesting citations in western Mediterranean are scarce and/or not recent (Lampedusa Island, Tunisia, Argano and Baldari, 1983; Corsica, Delaugerre, 1987; Sardinia, Tunisia and Sicily, see also Dodd, 1988 and Groombridge, 1990). No nesting sites have been found either in Algeria or in Morocco although this coast has been prospected intensively (Laurent, 1990).

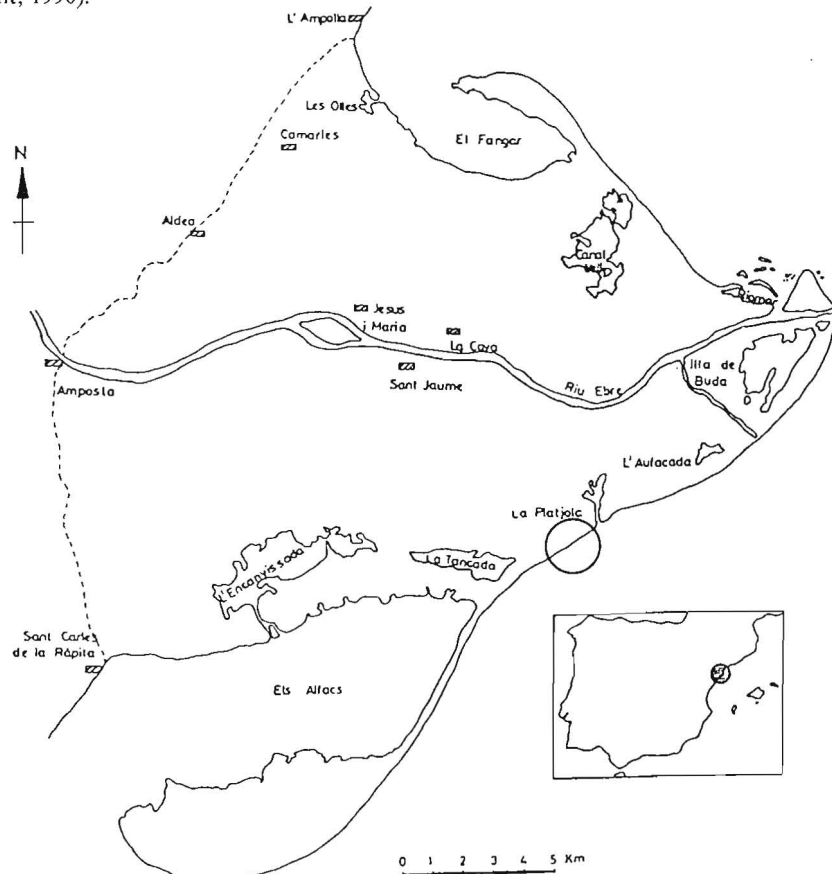


Figure 1 – Locality of the record.

On the Spanish coast, very few records have been registered during the last 100 years. Mayol (cited by Groombridge, 1990), points out that the low sand temperatures, the marine currents and the human disturbance could preclude the turtle nesting or the embryo development. Despite of that, a probable case of nesting was detected in Mar Menor (Murcia province, SE Spain) in 1870 and is reported by Salvador (1974). Since then, only an adult female was reported to be found in healthy condition on a beach near Málaga (Camiñas, 1988).

In September 1990, a hatchling Loggerhead Turtle was found dead on ground on Eucaliptus beach, located in the south of the Ebro Delta near La Platjola lagoon (NE Spain, U.T.M. square 31TCF00 Fig. 1.). This site is close to a protected area: the Parc Natural del Delta de l'Ebre. No other hatchlings were detected at the same time. The specimen was picked up by an amateur naturalist and stored for two years in the DEPANA (Defensa del Patrimoni Natural) head office without publishing that information.

The specimen shows the yolk sac connected to the belly (Fig. 2). Some of its biometrial and meristic features are:

- Carapace straight length: 34.10 mm
- Carapace straight width: 27.50 mm
- Plastron length: 24.90 mm
- Plastron width: 25.00 mm
- Number of vertebral scutes: 6
- Number of costal scutes: 6
- Number of marginal scutes: right 13/left 12
- Number of inframarginal scutes: 3 (+ 1 small)
- Number of prefrontal scales: 4

The animal was deposited in the collection of the Department of Animal Biology (Vertebrates) at the University of Barcelona with the number DZBH-2687.

The presence of yolk sac seems to indicate that this animal is an unborn individual belonging to a clutch deposited on this beach. It is interesting to remark that the number of vertebral and costal scutes (6 in both cases, instead of 5) are higher than usual (Dodd, 1988).



Figure 2 - Hatchling of Loggerhead Turtle (*Caretta caretta*) found in Ebro Delta (Spain). Dorsal and ventral view.



Additionally, a carapace of a young Loggerhead Turtle (less than 20 cm length) is conserved in the museum of the Ebro Delta Natural Park (Bertolero, pers. com.). It was collected in 1991 on the outer coast of the Ebro Delta (no more details were provided).

The Ebro Delta is geologically very recent. The southern lobe completed its development during the XVIth century and the sand bar of Trabucador was formed only 100 years ago (Maldonado, 1977). The lack of historical references and complementary information in relation to these isolated records do not allow us to catalogue the Ebro Delta as a habitual nesting site. Nevertheless, further research should be carried out for any sign of nesting in order to envisage protection measures for this site.

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