

Status of leatherback turtles in Qatar

1. Introduction

Qatar is approximately 160 km in length and up to 90 km in width, and projects out on the west coast of the Arabian (Persian) Gulf and is bounded by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Oman. Some old, now degraded coral reefs, extensive seagrass beds and small mangrove strands occur all around the coast.

2. The legal protection status for leatherback turtles

2.1 Overview

Qatar has ratified the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution of the Sea by Oil (1954), the Kuwait Regional Convention for Cooperation on the Protection of the Marine Environment from Pollution (Kuwait Action Plan), and the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention), the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna or Flora (CITES). The Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) takes an active interest in the marine environment and in other aspects of cooperation for environmental management.

2.2 Management agencies responsible for marine turtle conservation

The ruling family and concerned industries are the main forces behind wildlife protection, and the main public body concerned with the protected areas system is the Supreme Council for the Environment and Nature Reserves (SCENR). The SCENR has broad environmental powers and responsibilities, including proposing and implementing environmental policy, drafting environmental laws and regulations, undertaking environmental analysis and assessment, coordinating environmental bodies and undertaking education programmes. Other governmental bodies which play limited roles in area protection include the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, Ministry of Finance and Petroleum and the Ministry of Electricity and Water. General fishing restrictions are enforced by the Fisheries Department.

3. Nesting populations

There are no historical or contemporary records of leatherback turtles nesting in Qatar.

4. Foraging populations

4.1 Overview

There are no records of leatherback turtles having been seen in Qatar's waters.

4.2 Threats to leatherback turtles

It is unlikely leatherback turtles are anything more than transients or waifs. If leatherback turtles were to be found in Qatar waters, they would be threatened by coastal gillnets, shipping and petroleum-related accidents/discharges. There are no commercial trawlers or long liners operating in Qatar waters.

4.3 Protection of foraging areas

At present there are no declared MPAs.

4.4. Gaps in capacity and requirements for improved conservation

The SCENR is a young (5 years) agency staffed with young, dedicated staff, but there is still a need for focussed science and conservation input to the SCENR, which typically has to deal with commercial contractors as they do work for the large industrial companies. This has resulted in a 'do as little for as much' work attitude on the part of the consultants, and the SCENR has been left with nothing more than a rehash of past data, year after year. For conservation to be effective, the SCENR needs to be working with the best and most current data sets, which they often do not get. There are plans however to continue with turtle conservation work in the country, sponsored by the SCENR, aimed at hawksbill turtles.