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## **AN UNUSUAL NEST ACTIVITY ALONG SOUTHERN SICILIAN COASTS: AN HOPE FOR SEA TURTLE SURVIVAL?**

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*Caretta caretta* nesting is an unusual event along the Italian coasts, and confirmed sites are increasingly rare. In the last 25 years, WWF Italy has documented about 30 nests along the southern beaches. But during the summer of 2005, an unusual event occurred on Giallonardo Beach, Agrigento (south Sicily). Two nests and two nesting attempts were identified along a 300 m stretch of beach. Such an event had never been observed before in Sicily, or in all of Italy, especially during July and August when crowds (vehicles, people, fires, pubs, fishermen activities, etc.) discourages turtles. At the end of July, some fishers saw a nesting attempt and reported the event. WWF Italy and Sicilian Fund for Nature guarded and protected the area. The morning after, turtle tracks were found but no eggs were deposited. A few days later, a turtle nested and the surrounding area was constantly checked. At the end of September, few hatchlings were found on the same beach and their tracks made it possible to find another nest, the fourth record of nesting activity in 2 months! After the hatch, the nest was excavated and only 26 of the 66 eggs had hatched (25.8% success). The development of the first nest wasn't regular and staff at Torre Salsa WWF Oasi offices decided to use an incubator. Unfortunately, few eggs hatched due to the presence of mildew on all 100 eggs

(1% of survival). All samples were preserved for future analysis. Incubation temperatures were checked throughout incubation of this nest by WWF volunteers. In addition, volunteers distributed information to summer visitors to involve them in monitoring and protecting this site for the future.

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