

Robin Hood and the Turtles of Zakynthos

September 2022

Through a dear acquaintance, Ada, a Greek woman who also sells organic olive oil, olives, almonds, and raisins in Austria, we were made aware of the problem that connects turtles and dogs, but also cats in Greece. The loggerhead sea turtle is seriously endangered worldwide, and there are still beaches in the Mediterranean where it lays its eggs, including on Zakynthos in Greece. Sea turtles lay their eggs on the same beach throughout their lives, even on beaches that are used by tourists. One hotel after another, sunbeds, parasols... all this means great danger for the turtles. Why?

The young turtles hatch early in the morning and orient themselves towards the light on the horizon of the sea. Illuminated hotels and illuminated swimming pools pose huge dangers, many turtles fall into the pools and die there. But even holes and sandcastles dug and built by children are a problem as an obstacle on the way to the sea. In fact, all these obstacles should be leveled in the evening when the tourists go home. Even parasols that are rammed into the ground can hit nests. Therefore, the nests are now protected and marked with protective baskets. The areas of the nests are also cordoned off with ropes and signs in different languages explain that there are important nests here that must be left alone.

On Zakynthos there is an association that takes care of the turtle nests, catalogs them, and opens the empty nests to see how many turtles actually hatched from the eggs. Ada is a biologist and, as a private person, takes great care of the turtles, as well as the stray dogs and cats. She explains to me that the sand dunes are very important to keep the sand dry and also the seagrass, which is a thorn in the side of many tourists. All of this is increasingly being removed and this means an additional danger for the turtles. If the sand is too wet, the eggs rot, the little turtles cannot develop and die. The large turtles come at night to lay 80-100 eggs in the nest, you can see their tracks in the sand and they look like a tractor has driven. When the little ones hatch after 3 months, their tracks can be seen very tiny in the sand.

In addition to all the existing dangers, there are new ones: dogs and cats, mostly strays, that destroy the nests to eat the eggs or even the little turtles, or, like the cats, to play with them. The cat population is particularly high around hotels, and this must be reduced in a humane way in the future - namely through castration. Robin Hood is now planning with Ada and the animal rights activist Sue from England, who has lived on the island for more than 30 years and runs the animal welfare association "Helping Paws", which uses animals to England are mediated and have a small animal shelter, to carry out these castration campaigns.

I was there in September and we were able to have initial talks, also with a veterinarian who will carry out the castrations. Robin Hood will bear the costs for this. We were able to speak with local animal rights activists who are very concerned about the turtle population, there were no new nests this year and the number of existing nests has declined sharply. Unfortunately, environmental influences, climate change and other factors are also responsible for this, but also the dogs and cats. At least we can do something about that so that one danger is reduced.

Zakynthos is a beautiful island with clear blue sea, olive groves, lemon trees, fig trees, no wonder it attracts countless tourists every year. We want to educate them and will distribute flyers, in hotels, shops, maybe also produce banners to draw attention to our project and also to collect donations for the not cheap castrations. Ada has also spoken to the hoteliers and has ensured that the garbage is no longer exposed but is no longer accessible to dogs and cats, as this also attracts more animals. There are feeding stations for these animals, where islanders bring food every day. The stray population is actually not very high and with this program we think that it will soon be under control.

Ada has a beautiful guest house and always houses animals, she does this as a foster place until they

can be placed. On her property, everyone is free and dog and cat get along wonderfully. Sue has her animal shelter in the mountains of Zakynthos and in addition to dogs and cats, a pony, cockatoo and two sheep have found a new home.

A problem in Greece that I was never aware of and that Ada made me aware of: On the mainland, calves that are not suitable for milk production or fattening are simply left in front of the farms, without food or water... condemned to die. However, we have to deal with this problem separately, because here it is necessary to uncover the actual facts.

Ada saved a cow, Mumu is almost a year old now and Ada takes good care of her. When she was still small, she even went for walks with her on the beach. Mumu is allowed to live, she is a symbol of all the calves that perish miserably. Robin Hood will also take care of this, because it cannot be right that in the 21st century animals are simply left to die, just because they are not profitable.

Litter is also a problem - plastic bottles, cans, these annoying masks, everything is thrown away everywhere. If we continue like this, we will all soon live on a giant garbage dump and the innocent animals and plants will suffer from our indifference!

What Ada and I were able to achieve on the spot: we gave interviews on the radio, one even live! We were able to talk about the problems in general, about the project in particular, and I was also able to present our project in Greenland. The media were very interested and are a great support for us! Robin Hood will try to help in Greece, we will have to keep the project small because we are already running many other projects and the financial resources are limited. Whoever has a heart for turtles - please help us help them! Thank you!

Love, Marion Löcker Animal Welfare Association Robin Hood