

Accepted for presentation at the 41st CIESM Congress 2016

**THE FIRST GENETIC ANALYSES OF THE LEATHERBACK TURTLE, *DERMOCHELYS CORIACEA*
FROM A STRANDING IN CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN**

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Abstract

On the 16 of July 2015, a dead Leatherback turtle, *Dermochelys coriacea*, stranded in Cirkewwa, Malta and was collected by the Armed Forces of Malta. This is the first stranded record of this species for the Maltese islands. As part of ongoing conservation field research on marine turtles around the Maltese islands, the presence of this species in the central Mediterranean has been monitored too for the past 20 years and has been recorded only three times. The specimen found dead and stranded was tissue sampled for genetic analyses at three mtDNA loci and three nuclear DNA loci. This allowed for a first time genetic study to compare the characters of this species in the Mediterranean with any other genetic sequence data already available for this species from other regions.