

TURQUOISE COAST ENVIRONMENT FUND



2023 & 2024 REVIEW





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Photo by Yusuf Özbey, Fish Owl

OUR VISION

The Turquoise Coast Environment Fund (TCEF) aims to protect, restore and regenerate the natural beauty, biodiversity and ecosystems of Türkiye's exceptional marine and coastal resources.

TCEF was established in 2022 to empower communities to actively engage in and contribute to the transformation towards sustainable food systems, biodiversity and ecosystem conservation. We believe environmental sustainability and economic renewal can go hand in hand.

TCEF has supported 36 brilliant grassroots projects over the past 2 years, raising more than €250,000.

OUR STRATEGY

We facilitate our vision and achieve our goals by:

Raising funds from people and businesses with strong connections to their homeland to support the best local initiatives to sustain Türkiye's diverse natural assets.

Supporting projects that bring both economic and social benefits to local communities and which can be scaled up and replicated across the region.

Building a solid network of people across Türkiye, united in boosting the work of local environmental champions.



Some of the organisations that TCEF supported between 2023 and 2024 — from left to right: Community Gardens of Marmaris Project, Inclusive Approach for Lake Gölbaşı (Hatay) Sustainability Project, Local Stewardship for Bodrum Kavakderesi River Project, Plastic-Free Shores, Plastic-Free Waters Project, Discover the Fish Owl Before It Disappears, Birds and Biodiversity of the Ayvalık Islands Project, Safeguarding Sharks and Rays in Samandağ Project.

NOTE FROM THE TEAM

“Between 2023 and 2024, the Turquoise Coast Environment Fund (TCEF) has awarded 18 grants totalling more than €180,000 to support a wide range of community-led environmental projects across Turkey’s Mediterranean and Aegean coasts.

From raising awareness of seagrasses in Bodrum to training farmers in sustainable water management in Hatay, each initiative has helped strengthen local ecosystems while empowering people to take action for nature.

Every project we’ve supported has not only contributed to environmental restoration but has also sparked new networks, ideas, and a renewed sense of hope.

Thanks to everyone who believes in our mission, we’ll continue to back bold, local solutions for a thriving coast and resilient communities.”



OZGE SONMEZ
Executive Director



“This year, I am moved by the unwavering dedication of our communities and the renewed hope found in every restored shoreline.

Together, we are not only protecting nature, but also nurturing a spirit of unity and resilience that will shape the future of our coasts.”



CAN KOSEOGLU
Chair

MAP OF OUR WORK

18 GRANTS ACROSS THE
AEGEAN, MARMARA, &
EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN



€180,000
FUNDS AWARDED



15 LOCAL CHAMPIONS
SUPPORTED



+2500 PEOPLE ENGAGED
THROUGH PROJECTS



3 ICONIC SPECIES AT THE
HEART OF OUR
CONSERVATION EFFORTS



AREAS OF INTEREST



Turkey lies at the crossroads of three major biodiversity hotspots — the Mediterranean, Irano-Anatolian, and Caucasus — making it one of the most ecologically significant countries in the world. Its extraordinary range of endemic species and diverse ecosystems underscores the urgent need for targeted conservation efforts.

In response, TCEF focuses its support on three interconnected areas that reflect our commitment to community-led, long lasting solutions for nature and people.



Plastic Free Shores Plastic Free Water Project, Antalya

EMPOWERMENT OF LOCAL NGOS

We empower local groups and champions, providing funds to support them with advocacy, education, networking, knowledge and data sharing, to fully realise their potential in delivering impactful work to protect and restore nature.



SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

We fund projects with a holistic approach including farm to fork strategies, agroecology, and small scale artisanal fisheries. We look for projects promoting successful socio-economic practices that lead to positive outcomes for our communities and ecosystems.



Artificial Reefs in Adana, Karatas

BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

We fund projects addressing marine, coastal and terrestrial conservation. We advocate for community driven, holistic and transparent management of resources. Additionally, we support approaches that aid in the restoration of agroecosystems, forests, wetlands, coastal and marine ecosystems and soil.

OUR WORK

Project Posidonia,
BlueExile Project,Türkiye's first environmentally-themed underwater park



ASI RIVER AND DELTA ENVIRONMENTAL VISION PLAN

Grantee: Antakya Environmental Protection Association

Duration: May 2024 - April 2025

Grant: €12,000

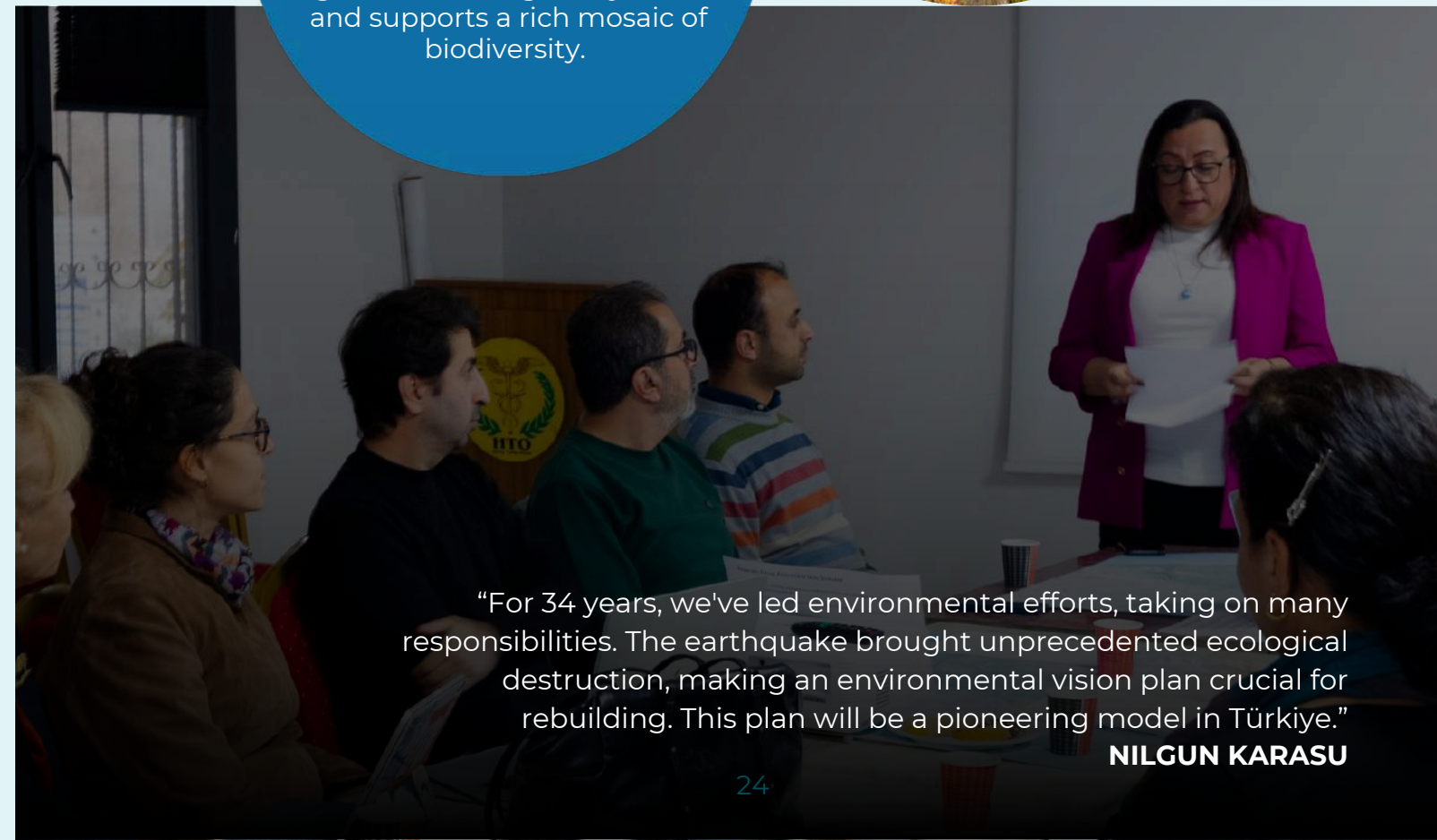
In the aftermath of the devastating earthquakes, the Asi River Delta and Samandağ coastline face not only structural damage but deep ecological risk. Without a resilient, nature-informed reconstruction plan, the region's wetlands, coastlines, and traditional agricultural landscapes remain vulnerable to irreversible loss.

This project supports the development of a participatory environmental vision plan for Antakya and surrounding areas — designed to guide long-term, eco-sensitive recovery. Through mapping studies, community workshops, and civil society partnerships, the plan will prioritise wetland protection, sustainable water use, and climate-adaptive land stewardship in the rebuilding process

A 16-member Technical Advisory Committee now leads the process, supported by on-the-ground workshops in Antakya and a media campaign that has reached national platforms including Anadolu Agency, Açık Radyo, and Yeşil Gazete. The plan's visibility is growing — and so is the momentum for implementation.

The team is now collaborating with the National Geographic Society's Freshwater Initiative to develop a pilot project focused on water resources and wetland conservation. With continued advocacy and public engagement, this project is laying the groundwork for a disaster-resilient, eco-friendly future in Hatay — where nature is not an afterthought, but a foundation for recovery.

Located along the Samandağ coastline, **Mileyha Wetland** is one of Hatay's most ecologically significant habitats. It provides essential feeding and **nesting grounds** for **migratory birds** and supports a rich mosaic of biodiversity.



"For 34 years, we've led environmental efforts, taking on many responsibilities. The earthquake brought unprecedented ecological destruction, making an environmental vision plan crucial for rebuilding. This plan will be a pioneering model in Türkiye."

NILGUN KARASU

SAFEGUARDING SHARKS AND RAYS IN SAMANDAĞ

Grantee: Nature and Science Association

Duration: May 2024 - May 2025

Grant: €12,000

Along the Hırlavuk coast of Samandağ, a fragile marine ecosystem shelters several critically endangered shark and ray species listed by the IUCN. This coastline has become an unexpected stronghold for marine biodiversity — yet it remains unprotected, and recent challenges, including the devastating 2023 earthquake, have increased pressure on its waters.

Rubble from the quake, bycatch, and ongoing habitat degradation threaten the survival of species including *Squalus blainville* and *Gymnura altavela*. In response, the Nature and Science Association launched a comprehensive monitoring and conservation initiative — combining scientific dives, local knowledge, and community engagement.

Spotting a ***Gymnura altavela*** is a rare and powerful reminder of the **rich biodiversity still surviving** in the **Mediterranean**. Its presence highlights the **urgent need for coastal protection** and **plastic-free marine** environments.



Squalus blainville is a small deep-sea shark species found in the Mediterranean Sea.



Over the course of the year, the team conducted 14 scientific dives, confirming Hırlavuk as a critical breeding ground for endangered species such as *Gymnura altavela*. Collaborative work with local fishers led to the first confirmed breeding records of *Squalus blainville* in the region — filling a crucial data gap for Türkiye's marine biodiversity.

To build capacity and public awareness, training sessions were held with over 30 participants, including fishers, diving clubs, and coastguard teams, focusing on species-safe handling and release techniques. The team also developed and distributed up to 500 educational materials across the region, and hosted an international workshop that gained strong media attention and public support.

These efforts helped spark momentum toward formal protection, with local organizations and press rallying behind calls to designate the area as a Marine Protected Area or Fishing Protection Zone.



LIFE IN THE REEDS: POYRAZ BIRD & SNAKE FISH

Grantee: Kazdağı Association for the Protection of Nature & Cultural Assets
Duration: September 2023 – August 2024
Grant: €7,500

The Akçay Wetland—nestled between the Gulf of Edremit and growing construction sites—was home to reeds, birds, frogs, eels, and a fragile balance of life. But only a third of its 148 hectares had legal protection. And with each passing year, more of it was lost to infrastructure projects, waste dumping, and neglect.

That's when the Kazdağı Doğal ve Kültürel Varlıkları Koruma Derneği stepped in—not with a one-time act, but with a campaign that combined science, education, culture, and collective memory.

The project launched with a clear goal: to document, celebrate, and defend the wetland through collective action.

- A petition campaign on Change.org collected 7,410 signatures, bringing national attention to the issue.
- On World Wetlands Day and World Water Day, community events brought together over 100 participants—students, families, activists, and even elected officials—to learn, observe birds, and speak out.
- A local veterinarian and expert ornithologists conducted five bird observation sessions, tracking key indicator species including herons, storks, and raptors.
- An Ecosystem Assessment Report was produced to guide future protection efforts with scientific evidence
- A mini-documentary film captured the voices and visuals of Akçay's ecological story, from children's wonder to scientific urgency.

“During a school field trip, a student discovered a baby frog among the reeds and excitedly tried to keep it. But after spending time around the wetland, the child gently released it back.

“It belongs here—not in a jar,” she said.

That single sentence reflected the heart of the project: this wasn't just about species, but about reconnecting people to place.”

ASLIHAN TOK, PROJECT COORDINATOR





PLASTIC-FREE SHORES, PLASTIC-FREE WATERS

Grantee: Ecological Research Association, EKAD
Duration: May 2024 – December 2024
Grant: £25,000

Under the blazing summer sun, EKAD volunteers and team took to Antalya's beaches—not just to clean up plastic, but to change habits, shift mindsets, and spark a movement.

The Plastic-Free Shores, Plastic-Free Waters project unfolded across the summer as a series of interconnected actions—combining clean-ups, environmental education, citizen science, creative play, and policy dialogue. From beaches to hotels, it brought people together to imagine and build a future with less plastic and more care for the sea.



A Shift in Consciousness

- 7 awareness-raising events, including 3 multi-day beach activities and 3 environmental education sessions
- Plastic-Free July workshops engaged families in DIY solutions to reduce plastic in everyday life
- Introduced Türkiye's first deposit return machine at a public beach, with hands-on demonstrations
- Partnered with plastic-free brands to showcase real alternatives to single-use items
- Distributed a 40-page book, "Towards a Plastic-Free Future", packed with facts, alternatives, and best practices, now available online and shared with stakeholders
- Developed digital educational games, now in use by hotels and schools

 **80** kg waste recycled

1,434 
people reached

20 
businesses engaged

DEPECHE MODE

HUBLOT

This project is being funded through the Conservation Collective partnership with Depeche Mode & Hublot.





FIRE & CLIMATE RESISTANT ISLANDS: BOZCAADA & GÖKÇEADA

Grantee: Eastern Mediterranean Research Society
Duration: August 2024 - July 2025
Grant: €12,000

This project addresses the urgent need to prepare Türkiye's Aegean islands for increasing wildfire risk and the long-term effects of climate change. Bozcaada and Gökçeada are home to distinct Mediterranean vegetation and native forest patches, but they face mounting pressure from drought, invasive species, and fire-prone landscapes.

With support from TCEF, the Eastern Mediterranean Research Association is developing an ecological restoration framework tailored to the unique conditions of both islands. The project combines scientific research with spatial analysis and local knowledge to assess the fire resilience of native plant species and propose nature-based solutions for future management.



Over the first six months, a vegetation mosaic map of both islands was produced using remote sensing and fieldwork. Surveys were conducted across 31 ecological sampling sites, cataloguing over 30 woody plant species and assessing their drought and fire tolerance using leaf trait data.

The team collaborated with the Ministry of Forestry to access critical spatial data and is currently finalizing ecological risk zones to inform future restoration and fire prevention strategies. The results will inform not only local land use and conservation, but also national-level strategies for island ecosystems facing intensifying climate pressure.

LEGISLATIVE STRENGTHENING FOR MARINE CONSERVATION

Grantee: Foundation for Law, Nature and Society (HUDOTO)
Duration: September 2024 - August 2025
Grant: €13,000

The protection of Türkiye's marine and coastal ecosystems often hinges on how well laws are understood, applied, and enforced. Yet many of the actors responsible for defending these spaces — from civil society groups to activists — lack the legal tools and shared understanding needed to advocate effectively.

This project set out to change that: HUDOTO conducted the first legal needs assessment of stakeholders working on coastal protection, gathering input from 57 participants across civil society, legal practice, and public institutions. It revealed key gaps: from limited awareness of constitutional rights and coastal legislation, to underuse of international conventions like the Barcelona Protocol.

Two interactive legal capacity workshops were held in İzmir and Burhaniye, engaging over 70 participants — including lawyers, municipal staff, ecologists, and activists. The sessions combined in-depth legal analysis with ecological perspectives, focusing on real-world advocacy experiences such as coastal development and environmental impact assessments.

The initiative helped spark new conversations around coastal rights as a public commons, while building bridges between the legal field and environmental movements. HUDOTO is now preparing a third workshop — this time incorporating camping and a field visit to foster dialogue, solidarity, and site-specific engagement with Türkiye's coastal conservation challenges.



LOOKING AHEAD

An overview of grants given so far in 2025

HONEY FORESTS AFTER FIRE

Grantee: Society for the Conservation of Nature and Culture
€18,000 awarded

This project restores fire-damaged forest landscapes in Muğla by promoting native aromatic species to create bee-friendly “honey forests.” It focuses on sustainable beekeeping, supports biodiversity, and incorporates traditional ecological knowledge while managing bear-beekeeper conflict. The findings will contribute to policy discussions around fire recovery, nature-based livelihoods, and Mediterranean ecosystem resilience.



BOZCAADA CORAL REEF CONSERVATION

Grantee: Social Climate Association
€17,900 awarded

This project protects rare *Cladocora caespitosa* coral reefs under pressure from tourism, anchoring, and illegal fishing. Through scientific diving, biodiversity monitoring, buoy installation, and creative outreach such as underwater sculpture and sound installations, the initiative raises awareness and informs marine conservation policy in Bozcaada.



LOCAL FISH FOR FOOD SECURITY

Grantee: Sustainable Living Association
€18,400 awarded

By reviving Foça’s culturally significant but under-consumed local fish species, this project promotes sustainable fishing, improves community nutrition, and supports small-scale fishers. Activities include culinary workshops, a local fish festival, a “Suspended Fish” donation system, and the production of short educational films — all aiming to revalue overlooked species and strengthen local food networks.



MARINE LITERACY VOYAGE

Grantee: Turkish Marine Research Foundation
€18,400 awarded

A scientific voyage aboard the TÜDAV MARU retraces the historic route of Pîrî Reis, conducting biodiversity surveys, microplastic monitoring, and public outreach at Aegean ports. The project culminates in a “Blue Gathering” in Çeşme — a multi-stakeholder forum to build marine awareness, policy engagement, and regional cooperation for ocean protection.

OUR TEAM

TCEF's local team consists of one local Executive Director and one Programme Assistant, assisted by scientific and technical advisors and the Steering Committee.



Ozge Sonmez
Executive Director



Didem Karagence
Programme Assistant



Can Koseoglu
Chair



Ben Goldsmith
Conservation Collective



Beti Mizrahi
Steering Committee



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Our Global Network



Turquoise Coast Environment Fund is a member of Conservation Collective, a global network of local foundations funding effective grass-roots conservation initiatives to protect the environment, restore nature and safeguard against climate change.

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THANK YOU

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We couldn't have done it
without your generous support.



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