

# VELADOR

Science-Based Sea Turtle Conservation Since 1959

Issue 3, 2014



Celeste McWilliams

## Sharing the fun and excitement of learning about sea turtles

Sea Turtle Conservancy (STC) has been conducting public outreach and education programs to raise awareness about sea turtles for more than 50 years. STC's focus on education increased dramatically in the early 90s, when the organization launched a program focused on sea turtle issues in the U.S. Drawing on over five decades of international sea

turtle research and conservation experience, STC's educational initiatives are improving the survival outlook for marine turtles in the United States, especially in Florida (which supports 90% of all the sea turtle nesting in continental U.S.). This is being accomplished by providing educational

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**Inside: Sea Turtle Friendly Lighting - What You Can Do**



**Tour de Turtles: Sponsor Spotlight - Contiki & TreadRight**

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materials to local sea turtle groups, coastal governments, teachers and students; recognizing citizens and businesses that are working for the benefit of sea turtles and their habitats; and using sea turtle migration-tracking as an online educational tool. Educational guides, lesson plans, activities and outreach materials are available free of charge or for download online at [www.conserveturtles.org](http://www.conserveturtles.org). Below, we take a closer look at several of STC's educational programs.

### ***Tour de Turtles***

STC's most popular education program is the annual Tour de Turtles (*see cover picture*), an online education event that tracks the migrations of sea turtles. Started in 2008, the Tour de Turtles (TdT) is a fun, educational journey through the science, research and geography of sea turtle migration using satellite telemetry. The TdT follows the marathon migration of four different species of sea turtles from their nesting beaches to their foraging grounds.



This event, which raises awareness about sea turtles and the threats they face, is staged as a "migration marathon." The "winner" is the sea turtle that travels the farthest during the three-month race. As each turtle is released, STC hosts public kick-off events celebrating the start of the race. In 2013, nearly 5,000 people attended turtle releases in Florida, Costa Rica, Panama and Nevis. In addition, more than 20,000 people from 130 countries visited on to the Tour de Turtles website in just three months. In total, over 16,300 teachers are now registered to use STC's education materials, which include lesson plans and activities covering topics such as Biology, Conservation, Geography, Earth Science & Mathematics that can be used with Tour de Turtles.

Many teachers enjoy adopting one of the Tour de Turtles competitors for their class and following along online, while using the educational materials STC provides. See Page 5 for ways to participate and support sea turtle conservation.

### ***Tortuguero Junior Research Assistant Program***

In 2008, STC created the Junior Research Assistant (JRA) Program in Tortuguero, Costa Rica, where STC has been doing research and conservation work since 1959. Through this program, STC is teaching local students not only about sea turtles, but also about sea turtle research. JRAs learn to identify each nesting stage, properly read tag numbers, measure turtles, check for any anomalies, and correctly record data in the field books. The hope is to encourage local young conservationists and train future research assistants, enabling them to protect the turtles and represent their village.

The tasks that the JRAs carry out as part of the program are similar to those of full Research Assistants: night patrols, nest and track surveys, cleaning

## VELADOR {bel.a.dor}

In Caribbean cultures, *Velador* translates as "one who stands vigil" — originally referring to turtle and egg harvesters who waited at night for turtles to come ashore. Now STC claims this title for its newsletter, and around the world STC's researchers and volunteers are replacing poachers as the new veladors. The *Velador* is published for members and supporters of the nonprofit **Sea Turtle Conservancy**. STC is dedicated to the conservation of sea turtles through research, advocacy, education and protection of the habitats upon which they depend.

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Developing educational posters to share with the community.

equipment, helping in the visitor center, and preparing educational activities. The students learn first hand about field work, the research methods used by STC, and the importance of following an established protocol. They also become an active part of STC's nightly sea turtle work by helping to collect data. Some even participate in the full 12 mile beach walk to count all tracks and nests. Small research and/or conservation projects are also developed and presented to other students at the local high school by the JRAs.

### **Distance Learning**

STC's newest education program is a distance-learning program that brings sea turtle education to life through virtual interactions with sea turtle experts. InterACT with

Sea Turtles: Distance Learning for K-12 takes an interactive, multimedia approach to sea turtle education using a virtual collaboration system to directly engage students in the classroom. InterACT with Sea Turtles was funded by a grant awarded from the Sea Turtle Grants Program, which is itself funded from proceeds from the sale of the Florida Sea Turtle License Plate.



JRAs use a sea turtle model to learn how to collect data.

This distance learning program provides educators with free online resources, access to expert staff, virtual presentations, multimedia resources, and comprehensive lesson plans that make sea turtle education fun and informative. STC's intent in creating InterACT is to make sea turtle education more accessible to educators by removing geographic barriers, allowing us to reach a wider audience and involve more students than ever to sea turtle and marine education. In this way, we are fostering a sense of stewardship for the environment among young people all around the U.S. and internationally.

Programs available through InterACT include:

- *Introduction to Sea Turtles* - An introduction to sea turtles, their biology, threats to their survival and conservation efforts.
- *Sea Turtle Adaptations* - A lesson that teaches students about physical adaptations to the environment.

*Sea Turtle Research & Data Evaluation* - Students learn how to interpret scientific findings using sea turtle nesting data.

*General Presentation* - A learning interaction with STC staff based on the grade level and teacher's curriculum. For each of these programs, STC provides materials for classroom activities that are to be conducted

• both before and after the distance learning interaction with STC staff.

• If you are interested in learning more about these programs, please visit [www.conserveturtles.org/educators.php](http://www.conserveturtles.org/educators.php).

**By Lexie Beach**  
Communications Coordinator

## Lights Out for Sea Turtles

On June 18th, 2014, an adult loggerhead turtle attempting to nest in Pensacola, Florida, was disoriented by lights from a nearby condo and street lights. This caused her to wander the wrong direction up the beach, through a parking lot, and into the street where she was subsequently struck and killed by a passing vehicle. According to the disorientation report, she had not laid her eggs on the beach prior to this tragic incident.

All sea turtle species are struggling to survive a multitude of threats in today's environment, but tragic events like this are made more palpable because they are preventable. Unlike many other causes of pollution and disturbance of sea turtle habitat, there are many simple and effective methods for managing lights to meet our needs while reducing impacts to sea turtles. We don't have to live in total darkness to protect sea turtles. Scientific research and lighting technology have advanced in recent years—leading to new discoveries that allow us to manage light in ways that meet our needs for human safety while using light sources and fixtures that don't lure nesting sea turtles and hatchlings away from the ocean.

This tragic and gruesome death of an adult loggerhead in Pensacola highlights the urgency of Sea Turtle Conservancy's (STC) campaign to correct problematic lighting and raise public awareness about available solutions. But we can't solve this problem by ourselves. Tens of thousands of sea turtle disorientations caused by artificial lighting are reported each year in Florida alone. It is estimated that there are currently between 700 and 1,000 private coastal properties in Florida with poorly-managed lighting causing sea turtle disorientations.



Keep it Low, Shielded & Long

In addition to working directly with beachfront property owners to identify and correct problem lights, STC is undertaking a broad public awareness effort to drive home some simple messages about how people who live near sea turtle nesting beaches can take matters into their own hands and become part of the solution.

In general, we advise coastal property owners to follow these basic guidelines to reduce lighting impacts to sea turtles:

**Keep it LOW** – Mount lighting fixtures as low to the ground as possible to avoid being seen from the beach and use the lowest amount of light needed for the task.

**Keep it SHIELDED** – Use fixtures that direct light down to the ground or away from the beach and shield the light source from the beach.

**Keep it LONG** – Sea turtles are less disturbed by long wavelength light (580 nanometers or longer), such as amber or red LEDs. LED lights will also help reduce your energy costs!

We also remind residents that interior lighting can also be highly visible from the beach and can disorient sea turtles as well. Tactics for addressing

this problem include moving lamps away from windows; using window treatments such as drapes to block light from illuminating the beach; and/or using a good quality window tinting with at least 15% transmittance.

To assist beach residents in properly managing their lights, STC recently produced a detailed lighting manual and accompanying DVD called "Darker Beaches, Brighter Futures – A Guide to Sea Turtle Friendly Lighting in Florida." The manual was developed to serve as a resource to help encourage property owners living in coastal communities to do what is best for sea turtles. The booklet instructs property owners

*continued at bottom of next page...*

## 7th Annual Tour de Turtles

The 7th Annual Tour de Turtles is right around the corner! Officially kicking off in August, this year's marathon migration event promises to bring fun activities and new turtle friends.

Each turtle is swimming for a cause to raise awareness about a specific threat to sea turtles. You can help by supporting a turtle and raising awareness about their cause. This year there are two ways you can get involved and support a sea turtle marathoner:

**Adopt-A-Turtle:** With a donation of \$30 or more (\$40 outside the U.S.) you can Adopt-A-Turtle through Sea Turtle Conservancy (STC) to show your support for a sea turtle and its cause. Included in the Adopt-A-Turtle kit is a personalized adoption certificate, a colorful logo decal, a hatchling magnet, and STC's Sea Turtle Conservation Guide, all presented in a beautiful full-color sea turtle folder. Adopt a turtle for yourself or as a gift for a friend or family member. Teachers can receive a special adoption rate for their classroom.

**Swim-a-Thon Pledge:** New this year! You can support your turtle by making a per-mile donation pledge for each mile they swim between August 1 and October 31, 2014. You can determine your own pledge amount, starting as low as \$0.05 cents per mile, and you can even set a maximum total pledge

amount. STC will provide you with sample distances for each species and an online calculator to estimate your pledge.

With either option, you will also become a Member of STC and receive a free one-year subscription to the *Velador*; STC's award-winning conservation newsletter. Your tax-deductible donation will help STC ensure sea turtles are swimming free in the oceans for future generations! Choose your favorite turtle based on name, location, personality, species, cause or sponsor. The choice is yours!

Each time a turtle is supported by an Adopt-A-Turtle Donation or a Swim-a-Thon Pledge, it will be recorded on the "People's Turtle Choice" graph online at [www.tourdeturtles.org](http://www.tourdeturtles.org).

The turtle that receives the most support will be declared the "People's Choice Winner" at the end of the race!

New this year is an exciting contest to win a VIP Sea Turtle Experience for the 2015 Tour de Turtles. If you make a Tour de Turtles donation by adopting a turtle or fulfilling a pledge at the \$100 level or above, you will automatically be entered for a chance to win up-close VIP access for two at the Melbourne Beach, FL Tour de Turtles release (tentative dates July 25-26, 2015). Winners must be 18 years or older or must be accompanied by an adult. 🐢

### ... Lighting from Page 4

on the best management practices for sea turtle friendly lighting and provides examples of specific light bulbs and fixtures to use for different lighting situations near sea turtle nesting beaches. Inserted into the back cover is an informative DVD about the issue of sea turtle disorientation and how we can all play a role in reducing light pollution in coastal communities.

As more and more coastal property owners utilize sea turtle friendly lighting, people who were once skeptical about it are seeing that new technologies do allow us to manage beachfront lights in ways

that provide plenty of illumination for our own needs while keeping the beach itself dark and safe for sea turtles. And new LED lighting has the added benefit of greatly reducing utility costs.

You can learn more about STC's lighting work and download a free copy of the "Darker Beaches, Brighter Futures – A Guide to Sea Turtle Friendly Lighting in Florida" online at <http://www.conserveturtles.org/beachlighting.php>. Please call or email STC to request a DVD copy of the lighting video. 🐢

**By Gwen Oberholtzer**  
*Lighting Project Specialist*

## Support the Florida Water and Land Legacy Initiative



Jim Stevenson

Protecting upland water sources will help lagoons, estuaries and coastal areas that are important to sea turtles.

In 1997, the Florida legislature approved the Sea Turtle Specialty License Plate. The idea for the specialty plate was conceived, designed and sponsored by the Sea Turtle Conservancy (STC). Almost every year STC would have to struggle to convince the legislature to fund efforts to protect Florida's sea turtles. To avoid this, STC sought a dedicated funding mechanism that would not be dependent on the vagaries of the legislature. Since 1997 the sea turtle specialty plate has raised millions of dollars that goes directly to supporting the state's sea turtle protection programs. Similarly, the Florida Water and Land Legacy campaign was conceived by residents and environmental organizations frustrated over inadequate state funding for critical environmental protection and land acquisition programs. For almost two decades Florida had the nation's premier land protection and conservation program; most recently called Florida Forever. In 2009, with the nation's fiscal crises deepening, the legislature de-funded this popular land buying program and cut funding for many other environmental protection programs. This campaign was designed to eliminate these funding short falls.

Florida's Water and Land Legacy Initiative is led by a coalition of thousands of volunteers and 300 civic and conservation organizations, including Sea Turtle Conservancy, the League of Women Voters, 1000 Friends of Florida, The Trust for Public Land, and the Florida Wildlife Federation, that have united to put the Florida Water and Land Legacy Amendment on the November 2014 ballot and help ensure its passage. Over the last year and

a half over 700,000 signed petitions were collected and verified to meet the requirement to place the Legacy constitutional amendment on the ballot. It will be Amendment 1. For the Amendment to pass, at least 60% of Florida voters have to vote "yes" on the measure. If approved, Amendment 1 will arguably be one of the most important state conservation initiatives in American history.

So what will Amendment 1 do? It will not raise taxes. It sets aside 33% of documentary stamp revenues for the next 20 years and

: places the money into a special Land Acquisition  
: Trust Fund. Documentary stamps are an excise tax  
: placed on all real estate transactions in Florida.  
: The money in the fund can only be used for the  
: purposes outlined in the amendment. Amendment  
: 1 states that the money must be spent "to acquire,  
: restore, improve, and manage conservation lands  
: including wetlands and forests; fish and wild-  
: life habitat; lands protecting water resources and  
: drinking water sources, including the Everglades,  
: and the water quality of rivers, lakes, and streams;  
: beaches and shores; outdoor recreational lands;  
: working farms and ranches; and historic or geo-  
: logic sites." The stated goals would be to manage  
: and restore natural systems and to enhance public  
: access and recreational use of conservation lands.  
: Wow, that is a tall order! If passed, the amend-  
: ment will raise about \$600 million in fiscal year  
: 2015-2016 and billions over its 20 year life.

: There has never been a greater opportunity to pro-  
: tect Florida's natural resources for future genera-  
: tions. Protecting beaches and shores protects sea  
: turtle nesting habitat. Protecting surface waters  
: enhances water quality in near shore marine  
: environments utilized by sea turtles. Join STC in  
: supporting Amendment 1. Together we can create  
: an environmental legacy we can all be proud of.  
: For more information or to learn about the cam-  
: paign and how you can support it, visit the Legacy  
: Campaign online at [www.VoteYesOn1FL.org](http://www.VoteYesOn1FL.org). And  
: don't forget to Vote Yes for Amendment 1 in Nov. 🐢

**By Gary Appelson**  
Policy Coordinator

# Sponsor Spotlight

Sea Turtle Conservancy (STC) is excited to introduce one of our newest Tour de Turtles competitors, Esperanza! Esperanza is an adult green sea turtle outfitted with a satellite transmitter on July 3, 2014, in Tortuguero, Costa Rica - the most important nesting site of the endangered green turtle in the Western Hemisphere. She was named by her sponsors, Contiki Holidays and The TreadRight Foundation, via a Facebook contest. Esperanza is the Spanish word for “hope.”

This is the first time Contiki and TreadRight have partnered with STC for the Tour de Turtles. This unique new partnership is focusing the spotlight on sea turtle conservation in popular tourism countries.

Contiki, a travel company founded in 1962, offers travel tours in 46 countries to 18 – 35-year-olds. The TreadRight Foundation is a nonprofit organization established in 2008 by Contiki and other travel brands to encourage sustainable tourism among their brands and the places they visit.

Lauren McPhillips, public relations and partnership manager for Contiki, said sponsoring a turtle in Tour de Turtles was a simple decision for them because the program increases the chance for the long term survival of sea turtles and, “aids in enabling a greater understanding of these majestic sea creatures and their migration patterns.”

In 2011, Contiki began Contiki Cares, which focuses on becoming a more sustainable organization by encouraging their travelers to respect and care for the places they visit so those places can be discovered for generations to come. They also partnered with environmental activist and documentary filmmaker Celine Cousteau.

According to McPhillips, “Contiki is obsessed with



all things sun, sand and surf, and have made ocean conservation the focus for partnerships.”



McPhillips said Tortuguero is a popular stop for travelers

who go on Contiki’s Costa Rica trip, and that it’s evident sea turtles are essential to Tortuguero. Both Contiki and TreadRight had recognized STC’s work in preserving the places they travel to for quite some time. They also admired that STC creates opportunities for young, aspiring researchers and conservationists.

Shannon Guihan, program director for TreadRight Foundation, said it was a combination of those things that made a partnership with STC “a perfect fit.”

In honor of Earth Month this year, Contiki sent Cousteau, along with 12 young storytellers, to Tortuguero to explore the Region’s beauty, learn about STC’s mission and tell the story of it all in their own ways. During their trip, the group of storytellers regularly posted to various social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to share their experiences. They also put together an inspiring video documenting their week-long visit to Costa Rica, highlighting STC’s work with sea turtles.

Since the storytellers trip, every Contiki Tour that goes through Tortuguero will have the opportunity to adopt a turtle through STC. In addition to sponsoring a Tour de Turtles competitor, Contiki and TreadRight also sponsored the research of a member of STC’s Research Assistantship Program.

McPhillips and Guihan said they are looking forward to seeing how their efforts aid in the research and survival of turtles like Esperanza and can’t wait to share the results with their travelers.

STC would like to thank Contiki and TreadRight for helping our cause! 🐢



“Esperanza” heads back to the ocean.

**By Lexie Beach**  
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*STC Intern*

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## Monthly Giving

### Support Sea Turtles!

If you are looking for a meaningful way to help protect sea turtles and their habitats, please consider becoming a Turtle Guardian by giving monthly to STC. Turtle Guardians are a very special group of STC Members, as their automatic and consistent donations help to provide the sustained resources needed to carry out long-term conservation programs, like our leatherback turtle program at Panama.

For as little as \$5 per month, you can become a Turtle Guardian, and receive a membership window cling and logo sticker, an annual Sea Turtle Scenes calendar, and issues of STC's newsletter, the Velador.



Help ensure that your gift to STC is used as efficiently as possible. Making regular, monthly donations to STC is the most convenient and efficient way to support our efforts to protect sea turtles. Monthly contributions require less paperwork and staff time for STC, which means that the greatest percentage of your gift goes directly to saving sea turtles. STC spends 85% of all donations directly on research, conservation and education programs, and has been recognized by charity watchdogs Guide Star and Charity Navigator, which has awarded STC its highest ranking eight years in a row for our commitment to transparency, good governance and fiscal responsibility.

Visit <https://www.conserveturtles.org/Secure/monthly-giving.php> to sign up to become a Turtle Guardian today. You are in total control of your gift. After your initial donation is processed, future donations will be charged to the same credit card on the day of the month of your choice. Monthly donations can be cancelled or modified any time, by calling Becca Gelwicks, STC's Membership Coordinator, at 352-373-6441, or emailing her at [becca@conserveturtles.org](mailto:becca@conserveturtles.org). And if you are already a Turtle Guardian, thank you, and please consider recruiting a friend to become one, too! 