



Science-Based Sea Turtle Conservation Since 1959

Issue 3, 2012

Sea Turtle Conservancy Expands its Conservation Work in Panama

Since 2003, Sea Turtle Conservancy has been working to recover hawksbill turtles at Chiriquí Beach, Panama—a remote, 20-mile stretch of coastline just south of Bocas del Toro that is one of the most important hawksbill nesting sites in the Caribbean. Hawksbill nesting at Chiriquí was nearly wiped out by decades of extensive harvesting for the international tortoiseshell trade. However, STC's sustained presence has greatly reduced poaching and other threats, and nesting levels are increasing each season. While STC's work at Chiriquí began as an initiative to recover hawksbills, it has been exciting to discover that this same beach hosts the fourth-largest nesting colony of leatherbacks in the world, with up to 6,000 nests per year.



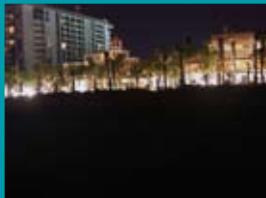
View of Soropta Beach, a 7-km black-sand beach located north of Bocas del Toro, Panama

Now, STC is taking advantage of a fantastic opportunity to expand its leatherback conservation work in Panama to include a site at Soropta Beach, a nearby stretch of coast just 7 km long, which hosts over 600 leatherback nests per year. Earlier this year, STC was approached by the London-based Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT), which has monitored and protected leatherbacks at Soropta Beach since 2002. For financial reasons, EWT is no longer able to operate the project at Soropta, and they have asked STC to take it over and manage the project.

Before EWT began its initiative ten years ago, nearly 100% of all eggs were being harvested from the beach. Even more disturbing, a significant number of nesting leatherbacks were being killed on the beach so their eggs and flippers

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**Inside: Education In Action:
Celebrating Five Years of
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**Update: Florida Legislature
Weakens Protection for Sea
Turtles**

Sea Turtle AdvoKids Making a Difference

Sea Turtle Conservancy launched Sea Turtle AdvoKids to give kids an opportunity to get involved in our efforts to save endangered sea turtle populations. In this issue, STC is recognizing three outstanding AdvoKids for going above and beyond in their quest to advocate and make a difference for sea turtles.

Sammy C. - 10 - Wisconsin



Sammy joined STC in 2010 with his first donation of \$83. His parents emailed STC and said that he was fundraising to save sea turtles by selling coffee and hot chocolate in his neighborhood in the middle of winter! They attached a picture of Sammy bundled up in a parka surrounded by snow. Since 2009, Sammy has raised more than \$600. Most recently, he played his viola at the Willy State Fair in Madison, Wisconsin and raised \$100. His parents said that our staff and fans on Facebook have inspired him even more.

Maya H. - 12 - New Jersey



Maya returned from visiting STC's Biological Field Station in Tortuguero, Costa Rica and emailed staff to say that she was impressed with the work being done to save endangered sea turtles. She adopted a turtle and named him Leonard. Inspired, Maya completed a "Mitzvah Project" by competing in a triathlon to raise funds for sea turtles. With help from neighbors, family, teachers and friends, she raised over \$600 in support of STC. She says, "the experience of raising money, training and competing in a Triathlon for Sea Turtle Conservancy makes me feel incredibly proud."

Cori M. - 8 - Florida



Cori has been volunteering (with her mom) for STC at the Barrier Island Center and during Tour de Turtles since 2008. This year, she hosted a school presentation about sea turtles and conservation to six second-grade classes -- more than 100 kids! Check out a video of her presentation on facebook.com/conserveturtles. She has also raised more than \$100 for STC and is currently a finalist for the Blue Ambassadors of the Year award for her commitment to sea turtle conservation.

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 Caribbean 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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Celebrating Five Years of Tour de Turtles Successes

I recall STC executive director David Godfrey walking through the door of my office in January of 2008 exclaiming, “I have a new idea for revamping our satellite-tracking education program based on the idea that saving sea turtles is a ‘marathon’ not a sprint.” He called Dan Evans, STC satellite-tracking guru, to join us in my office and explained how he had started brainstorming an idea during the International Sea Turtle Symposium that would take the organization’s pioneering use of the Internet to track sea turtles to a whole new level. We talked over the details of David’s idea and by the end of the day the “Tour de Turtles” had been ‘hatched.’

Using satellite-tracked turtles scheduled to be released that summer, STC created a fun, interactive website to raise awareness about threats to sea turtles. Each of the turtles would compete in a mock sea turtle marathon, all with the goal of seeing how far they could swim during their migrations, while STC gathered important data on their pelagic movements.

A secondary competition was also developed to raise awareness about specific threats sea turtles face—the Causes Challenge. By encouraging people to sponsor individual sea turtle competitors, Tour de Turtles also gave audiences a mechanism for directly supporting STC’s conservation efforts. Turtles symbolically compete in the event to help raise awareness about different issues affecting sea turtles, including commercial fisheries bycatch, marine debris, harvesting of turtles and eggs, illegal trade in hawksbill shells, etc. While the research and educational components of Tour de Turtles were fun and interesting, we wanted fans to become personally invested in these sea turtles through the Causes Challenge.

During that first year of Tour de Turtles, STC tracked nine turtles representing five species from five different locations. This included an olive ridley turtle from El Salvador; this was both the first ridley ever tracked by STC, as well as the first turtle in the Pacific. STC hosted successful public releases of

some of the satellite-tracked turtles, which allowed more than 1,000 people to get up close to an adult sea turtle and see our scientists at work on the beach.

Fast forward to 2012. As I prepare to recount this year’s migration marathon, I swell with pride to see how far Tour de Turtles has come in five years because of supporters like you and our generous corporate sponsors. As members of STC, your passion and support for sea turtles has driven Tour de Turtles. Together with new and longtime sponsors, volunteers, research partners and staff, the fifth anniversary of Tour de Turtles truly captures what sea turtle conservation is all about!

As this newsletter goes to press, Tour de Turtles is tracking 13 sea turtles representing four species from six different nesting locations across the Caribbean and Atlantic, including another first, this time tracking turtles from Mexico’s Yucatan Peninsula.



Credit Celeste McWilliams

Sea turtles seem to love beautiful, tropical beaches just like people do, so as we launch the Tour de Turtles each year we often have the privilege of traveling to exotic locations in search of turtles to participate in the research and education program. Of course, the turtles themselves don’t know they are participating in such a widely monitored event. At many of our launch sites, we host several hundred (and sometimes more than 1,000) people who come out to watch the satellite-tagged turtles crawl back to the sea to begin their migrations. Both public and private support for the program has greatly exceeded our hopes. As a result of generous contributions from sponsors, foundations, and members like

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Bermuda Turtle Project Vital to Studying Juvenile Turtles

Sea turtles have an incredibly complex life cycle. Hatchlings emerge from their nests on tropical beaches, crawl to the sea and then swim off for many years to grow and develop at distant feeding grounds. After several decades the mature females then return to the nesting beach where they were hatched, and the process begins all over again. Most sea turtle research focuses on nesting beaches, such as STC's long-term programs at Tortuguero, Costa Rica, and Chiriquí Beach, Panama. Investigating reproductive biology and nesting behavior of adult females, and studying nest survivorship and hatching success are certainly important. However, this research tells just one part of the sea turtle story. To find out more about the behavior and threats faced by immature turtles, one must leave the beach behind and take a good look at what turtles are doing in their marine foraging areas.

At first glance, Bermuda might seem an unlikely location for young turtles to migrate to considering its relatively small size (just 20.6 square miles) and its position in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean -- some 1,000 km from the nearest landmass. At one time there was an important aggregation of nesting green turtles in Bermuda, which were unfortunately harvested to extinction. Nowadays the island (or more correctly islands – there are over 180 in total) supports a healthy population of juvenile green and hawksbill turtles in its numerous reefs and extensive sea grass flats.

In 1968, Dr. H. Clay Frick, II, a Board member of Sea Turtle Conservancy (formerly Caribbean Conservation Corporation), began a tagging program that focused on the juvenile turtles of Bermuda. This research program, now the longest-continuous in-water study of sea turtles in the world, is continued today as the Bermuda Turtle Project (BTP) -- a collaborative effort between Sea Turtle Conservancy (STC), the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo (BAMZ) and the

Bermuda Zoological Society. Drs. Anne and Peter Meylan, research associates with STC, are the scientific directors for the project. As part of the project, each summer a two-week course is conducted for international participants and Bermudian students wanting to learn about the biology of sea turtles and to gain practical experience in the methods used to capture turtles in-water. I was lucky enough to have participated as a student in this course back in 2004, and this year, now as STC Scientific Director, I returned to Bermuda to help with the 2012 research program and the training course.

Every morning as we made our way aboard the research vessel RV Endurance to the study site that had been selected for the day, we held a discussion on a different aspect of sea turtle biology; from



classic papers by Dr. Archie Carr to recent studies using modern research techniques, such as stable isotope analysis.

Once at the day's study site, we set a long circular net around an area of sea grass and patch reef roughly the size of a football field. All the turtles on the inside of the net would gradually become entangled in the net. To ensure that none of the turtles was ever harmed, teams of snorkelers constantly patrolled the net. As turtles became caught they were immediately removed and brought aboard the main research boat.

Once on the RV Endurance, each turtle was placed in a styrofoam 'bed' to stop them from crawling around and possibly injuring themselves. They were then tagged, measured, weighed and released back into the ocean.



We also got to work with a research group studying Bermuda's sea grass (the main food of green turtles). They put cameras and transmitters on some of the bigger turtles we caught to learn more about what they eat, their eating behavior, and their daily movements. The footage they shot was quite informative, as it gives a fantastic 'turtle's eye view' of everything the turtle sees and does.

A special event for 2012 was the public release of a turtle with a satellite transmitter. This turtle, named 'Fripper' by sponsor RenaissanceRe, is



one of five competing in the Bermuda Tour de Turtles (also called the Race on the Rock). Fripper was released early one morning in front of a large crowd of interested spectators. The event was widely covered by local newspaper and television stations, and thousands of Bermudians are actively following the movements of the participating turtles. Anyone with Internet access can follow along for free as well at www.tourdeturtles.org/bermuda.



2012 Bermuda Turtle Project Participants

The 2012 research season in Bermuda was a great success. Research was conducted at 14 foraging sites; 144 green turtles and one hawksbill were caught and released. This included 32 turtles that had been tagged in previous years of the project. Now, I just have to wait another 20 years or so before these juvenile green turtles show up as adults on the Tortuguero nesting beach. 

*By Dr. Emma Harrison
Scientific Director*

Florida Legislature Weakens Protection for Sea Turtles

The 2012 Florida Legislature may have dealt a severe blow to sea turtle conservation when it passed the regulatory streamlining bill -- House Bill 503. Among many other things in the bill, it also removed the requirement that certain types of large new development projects adjacent to the beach must have a permanent "sea turtle friendly" lighting plan as part of their permit.

Deep in the 41-page bill is language establishing a new "general permit" for large development projects that require storm water management systems. These new permits will be issued for projects that cover less than 10 acres and have less than 2 acres of impervious surface; hence they are referred to as 10-2 general permits. They replace the much more complicated Environmental Resource Permit. The general permit describes in detail what the permit applicant is allowed to do. The permit is then granted through a self certification process with limited agency oversight. This general permit "fast track" approach is being pushed by Florida Governor Rick Scott and the legislature in their ongoing efforts to streamline regulatory oversight of development activities.

Environmental Resource Permits (ERP) are issued for projects that require storm water systems or otherwise alter surface water flows. They regulate the construction of large development projects. Most ERPs can only be issued if they meet a "public interest test" or provide "reasonable assurance"

that threatened and endangered species or their habitats will not be harmed. For over a decade this has meant that ERPs must include approved lighting plans to protect sea turtles when these large developments (high-rise condominiums or hotels) are adjacent to nesting beaches. The new 10-2 general permit removes the requirement of a lighting plan. Unfortunately, this reduction in sea turtle protection was not disclosed in the detailed bill analysis that accompanied the new legislation or by the bill's legislative sponsors as it moved through the legislature.



Examples of beachfront lighting from a sea turtle's perspective on the beach



lights. There are also local lighting ordinances that may kick in and help regulate beachfront lighting allowed under a 10-2 permit, but the effectiveness of these ordinances vary greatly from county to county. Regardless of these other safeguards, the new 10-2 permits likely will allow large multi-family structures to be built adjacent to important nesting beaches without turtle-safe lighting. This will be a major setback for sea turtle conservation in Florida. 

*By Gary Appelson
Florida Policy Coordinator*

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you, we have so far raised more than \$80,000 in direct support of sea turtle research, education and conservation programs.

Tour de Turtles has received such positive feedback results that in 2012 we recruited our partners in the Bermuda Turtle Project to join us in launching a Bermuda-focused edition of Tour de Turtles (Race On the Rock) to satellite-track juvenile green turtles in Bermuda's nearshore waters (See Emma Harrison's story on page 4).

Our work is not done yet. If you believe in protecting endangered wildlife and educating the next generation about sea turtles, help STC spread the word about Tour de Turtles. If you have adopted one of the competitors, cheer for your turtle on facebook.com/conserveturtles and on Twitter @

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could be harvested—leaving the rest of the poor turtles to rot on the beach. EWT's intervention virtually eliminated egg poaching, and nesting by leatherbacks has increased from around 450 nests per year in 2002 to a high of 675 in 2010. Without a year-round conservation presence at Soropta, poachers will move back in and erase the gains of the past decade. STC's goal is to continue the successful program set up by EWT to protect this critical leatherback nesting beach.

Expanding STC's work in Panama to include Soropta fits perfectly with our ongoing research and conservation programs at Chiriquí Beach and other nearby nesting sites. While protecting Soropta's leatherbacks, the new program also opens up exciting opportunities for training turtle biologists and launching an eco-volunteer program for people interested in working specifically with leatherbacks.

STC's research and conservation work at Soropta will be based out of a modest camp that includes



Slaughtered Leatherback at Soropta Beach

lodging for staff and volunteers, plus a small cafeteria, storage and restroom/shower facilities. Most importantly, in addition to the camp facilities, STC will acquire 35 acres of prime beachfront property along the nesting beach at Soropta. Thanks to generous support from the Firedoll Foundation, STC has been able to purchase the land and existing station facilities from EWT.

You can also take a moment to get to know the companies and other private entities that sponsor each of the Tour de Turtles competitors. Links to each are included on the event website (www.tourdeturtles.org). Their sponsorship support helps makes TdT possible.

Most of all, I want to give you, our loyal members, kudos for getting involved in sea turtle conservation and following the inspiring migrations of these amazing animals on our website. Your participation is what makes this program a real success. 

By Rocio Johnson
Public Relations Coordinator

STC will take over management and protection of this critical leatherback nesting site in time for the start of the 2013 nesting season. Our challenge now is to raise sufficient funding to support a year-round monitoring and protection program at this site. To help us launch and maintain this important new project, please consider making a donation using the envelope included in this issue. With support from our members, the new Soropta project will help STC protect more turtles and train more scientists. Stay tuned to hear more about our upcoming work in Soropta. 

By David Godfrey & Chris Ann Keehner
Executive Director & Development Director



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Endowment

Lisa Jo Randgaard Endowment Fund

Lisa Jo Randgaard was born with a serious congenital heart condition that presented extraordinary physical challenges during her too-brief 43 years, but she battled hard to overcome these difficulties, and continued to inspire everyone with her wit, wisdom, and generosity. One particular passion for her was wildlife and its protection, especially sea turtles. She took great joy in supporting Sea Turtle Conservancy in a variety of ways, one of which was adopting turtles such as Zoe and Mango, in whom she saw strength, yet considerable vulnerability. Lisa could relate personally to this life struggle, and the parallels with her own life fostered in her a special level of compassion and empathy. Lisa introduced others to STC and its online sea turtle migration tracking program. She was always well-versed on the migration routes and miles traveled by various turtles.



When Lisa passed away unexpectedly from complications of her disease in May 2012, her parents and three siblings chose to honor her as a committed conservationist by establishing The Lisa Jo Randgaard Fund, making it the first member-initiated endowment fund since STC was founded in 1959. Lisa's family approached STC about creating an endowment fund as a lasting legacy for their beloved daughter and sister to provide ongoing annual support for the organization's many sea turtle conservation programs. The family set a goal of building the fund to at least \$50,000, and they warmly invite other STC supporters to contribute to help ensure that "Lisa's Fund" is an enduring catalyst for sea turtle preservation with annual proceeds used for ongoing sea turtle research, conservation and education programs. STC is honored to establish The Lisa Jo Randgaard Fund in recognition of Lisa's life, and her loyal membership and tireless passion for sea turtles.



Sea Turtle Conservancy is proud to be consistently recognized by charity watchdogs GuideStar and Charity Navigator for our commitment to transparency, good governance and fiscal responsibility. STC has received Charity Navigator's coveted 4-Star ranking for seven years in a row. STC uses your donations wisely and efficiently to conduct sea turtle research and conservation. To learn more visit www.guidestar.com and www.charitynavigator.com.

