

## Marine Turtle Specialist Group

George Balazs

For the second year in a row, a regional meeting of the Marine Turtle Specialist Group (MTSG) was held during February at Jekyll Island, Georgia. The meeting was convened by Group chair, Karen Bjorndal, immediately following the annual Sea Turtle Symposium. Over 100 members were on hand to participate. Some of the important topics discussed included funding for translations and publication of the MTSG Action Plan, Caribbean hawksbill conservation issues, sea turtle population modeling and genetics, matters relating to CITES, and the potential of ecotourism in sustainable utilization of sea turtles. Another regional MTSG meeting is scheduled for this year in December to coincide with the World Herpetological Congress in Australia. Members who are able to attend this event are encouraged to contact Dr. Bjorndal with suggestions for agenda topics.

Several MTSG members were invited to attend a special workshop on conservation issues of the hawksbill turtle held in Tokyo this past March. The gathering was sponsored by the Japan Bekko Association and Japan's Ministry of International Trade and Industry. This was the fourth such meeting since 1988 in which frank, open, and productive discussions took place between bekko industry representatives and conservationists from the international community. One of the most significant events of the meeting occurred when industry spokesman, Mr. Bunki Nakagowa, formally apologized for Japan's role in contributing to the worldwide endangered status of the hawksbill turtle. It was pledged that the industry would take some significant steps to aid in the recovery of the species. The MTSG will be watching with great interest to learn exactly what conservation actions will be pursued.

Honor was recently bestowed on MTSG member Colin Limpus when he was awarded the Australian Public Medal for his work with sea

turtles. Dr. Limpus' outstanding research, along with his educational activities on behalf of sea turtle conservation, were prominently mentioned in this prestigious award.

During early June several MTSG members traveled to Western Samoa to participate in a meeting of the Regional Marine Turtle Conservation Program of the South Pacific Regional Environmental Program. Representatives from over a dozen Pacific island nations were in attendance. Accomplishments during this three day meeting included the formulation of Regional Strategic Plan for Sea Turtles for 1994-1996. A resolution unanimously adopted included the following recommendations:

- that there be an immediate and substantial reduction in the numbers of turtles being killed throughout the region;
- that countries of the region be encouraged to ban international trade in turtles and turtle products;
- that countries of the region be encouraged to introduce a moratorium, or where possible a permanent cessation, on within-country commercial transactions of turtles and turtle products, allowing only cultural and/or subsistence takes; and
- that 1995 be ceremonially considered the *Year of the Sea Turtle* in the Pacific region, and that whenever and wherever possible and practical, on a voluntary basis, restraint be exercised in the killing of turtles for all purposes.

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# Species

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