
PRESIDENT'S REPORT ON THE 23RD ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM ON SEA TURTLE BIOLOGY AND CONSERVATION

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The 23rd Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation was held between 17 and 21 March 2003 at The Legend Hotel in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, hosted by the Community Conservation Network, Hawaii, and WWF-Malaysia. The meeting was attended by slightly more than 300 participants representing 73 countries, a dramatic drop in participation from previous years brought about in no small part by the looming war in the middle east region and concerns over travel safety. For 22 years the Symposium had been an Americas-based event, even though it is the annual gathering of the "international" sea turtle society, and with the move to Malaysia, the Symposium hoped to raise the awareness among the general public of the plight of marine turtles in Southeast Asia, and share the enormous expertise of the world authorities on sea turtles with this so-far underrepresented region. Adopting the theme, "Living With Turtles", the Symposium had a very personal flavour, and the smaller number of participants made it possible to make and renew acquaintances, and have time for discussion between sessions. While the travel safety concern excuse was often quoted, it was a pity, particularly to the large contingent of people who attended the event for the first time from underrepresented regions, that many of the household names linked to marine turtle biology and conservation were not present to share their knowledge and promote the global concerns on the plight of turtle populations.

The venue was ideal for the event, and the staff were attentive and keen to assist in bringing together what resulted in being a seamless event right from the very beginning. Notwithstanding the typically-higher price range of the hotel, the management were extremely flexible in pricing their services, food and beverage at reasonable costs to accommodate and even lower the typical prices encountered at several previous venues. I believe the room costs (USD 45 per night) and food costs (circa USD 10 per day) in many ways offset the higher travel costs encountered by a percentage of the participants.

The Symposium also included a number of side events, including the 10th Annual Reunion of Latin American Specialists spearheaded by Alejandro Fallabrino, the 2nd Meeting of Mediterranean Specialists put together by Dimitris Margaritoulis, each of which comprised over thirty participants, and the first meeting of the Advisory Committee to the Memorandum of Understanding on the Conservation and Management of Marine turtles and their Habitats of the Indian Ocean and South East Asia (IOSEA MoU), coordinated by Douglas Hykle. There was also a special lunch session on Freshwater Tortoises put together by Chuck Shaffer to take advantage of the location to address regional issues on the tortoise trade, a discussion session on the interactions between fisheries and marine turtles organized by Paolo Casale, from WWF Italy, and the annual meeting of the IUCN Marine Turtle Specialist Group (MTSG), spearheaded by Perran Ross.

The Special Session for 2003 was entitled "Indigenous Cultures and Marine Turtles" and was an attempt to bring together people from different ethnic backgrounds for whom turtles have a religious or cultural significance, and to address the issue of use versus conservation, or even their coexistence, providing time for discussions among the varied and opposing viewpoints.

A major component of the educational aspect of the Symposium was the Tagging and Telemetry Workshop, for which a number of companies contributed materials and effort. Stockbrands Pty. Ltd. (Australia) and National Brand and Tag Co. (USA), donated conventional flipper tags and applicators; Destron (EID Aalten B.V., Europe), Biomark (USA) and Trovan loaned of PIT tag readers and donated applicators and many PIT tags; and Sirtrack Pty. (New Zealand) and Telonics (USA) provided dummy satellite transmitters for attachment during the workshop.

Given the impending threat of war in the middle east region, many participants cancelled their registration and many more simply did not attend, creating a major problem in the development of the programme. Therefore, shortly before the event started, the committee completely rebuilt the programme to do away with the numerous gaps created by the cancellations. In the end we showcased over 70 oral presentations and 158 posters, and many parts of the world were represented for the very first time at the event. In an effort to maintain some of the standards that had been set during previous meetings, simultaneous translation was provided from Spanish to English and vice-versa during the entire event.

As occurs each year, the student awards competition again attracted a significant number of participants. The results of the student awards competition were as follows: Biology paper runner up - Fulvio Muffucci, Zoological Station of Naples: "Trace elements accumulation and tissue distribution in loggerhead turtles from the Western Mediterranean Sea". Biology paper winner - Rusty Day, College of Charleston: "Mercury in loggerhead sea turtles in the southeast US: assessing health impacts and

developing monitoring strategies". Biology poster winner - Eduardo Amir Cuevas Flores, Universidad de Merida: "Mapping and characterizing foraging habitat of immature hawksbill turtles in front of the biosphere reserve Ria Lagartos, Yucatan, Mexico". Conservation paper winner - Yianna Samuel, Cornell University: "Underwater noise and anthropogenic disturbance in critical sea turtle habitat". Conservation poster winner - Cathi Campbell, University of Florida: "Assessment of the Tortuguero, Costa Rica green turtle population". I would like to take this opportunity to once again congratulate all the winners for the outstanding contributions.

This year the Society was the recipient of a number of grants from various organizations and Foundations. The Symposium managed to attract USD 127,000 in funding to support travel awards, the costs of hosting the event, and the simultaneous translation services. Support for this symposium came from many sources, reflecting the diverse nature of the group the international sea Turtle Society has become: the NOAA / National Marine Fisheries Service Southeast Fisheries Science Center and Office of Protected Resources, the David and Lucille Packard Foundation, the Western Pacific Fisheries Management Council, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (Science Branch), the World Wide Fund for Nature (UK), the Global Green Fund, RARE Center, the ASEAN Regional Centre for Biodiversity Conservation, the Homeland Foundation, and the Convention on Migratory Species.

In addition to the funds raised through grants, the Symposium also had some 35,000 to 40,000 in income from registration fees, sales and auctions, for an approximate total of circa USD 163,000, and experienced costs in the region of USD 148,000. When all was finally tabulated by our Treasurer, the Symposium contributed a sum of over USD 10,000 to the Society's accounts.

Another initiative that took place during the 23rd STS was a membership drive for the International Sea Turtle Society, which is currently undergoing the transition from Annual Symposium to Society. Membership in the Society will provide voting privileges and discounts on registration fees for the annual symposia, and the fees will also go toward supporting the Marine Turtle Newsletter, which is a key information dissemination avenue for Society-related announcements and reports. I would encourage all who have not done so to sign up as members through the www.seaturtle.org website.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank once again the people who made this event possible through their contributions in time and dedication: Michael Coyne, who made the website available; Sam Sadove and Kartik Shanker for putting together the program; Brendan Godley and Matthew Broderick for arranging the Tagging and Telemetry Workshop; Chuck Shaffer for arranging the Freshwater Tortoise session; Paolo Casale for putting together the discussion session on Fisheries/Turtle Interactions; and Jeff Seminoff, Ana Barragan, Karen Eckert, Alan Bolten, Brendan Godley, and Angela Fromia for getting all the travel awards out to those in need. A great deal of appreciation goes to Ed Drane for helping keep accurate control of our finances, and to Manjula Tiwari, Leslie du Toit, Anny Chaves and Herda Hutabarat for translating all the announcements. Finally, I'd like to thank Matthew Godfrey, Kartik Shanker and Lisa Campbell for helping arrange the Indigenous Session, which was a highlight of the event.

The annual gatherings of our membership are a highlight of the year and also an important opportunity for us to share our ideas, knowledge and experiences. However, the Society should not limit itself to just meeting once a year. Both Rod Mast (president elect) and I have committed to developing plans for an expansion of the Society's roles, and we welcome any feedback from the membership.

Finally, for me personally, putting together this Symposium was a wonderful experience. A significant addition to my workload, but an unforgettable experience nonetheless. I got to meet many new people, make many new friends (and probably some enemies along the way too), and generally felt it was a constructive effort and extremely rewarding. Given the nature of people who work with marine turtles, many of whom are personal friends of mine, this is not that hard to understand. I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible at our next venue in Costa Rica. I am sure it will be another memorable event!

SYMPOSIUM COMMITTEE

Organizers	Community Conservation Network WWF Malaysia
President	Nicolas J. Pilcher
Registration Coordinator	Carmen Leong Pilcher
Program Chair	Sam Sadove
Program Co-Chair	Kartik Shanker, Nicolas Pilcher
Web Master	Michael Coyne
Announcement Translators	Anny Chaves, Leslie du Toit, Manjula Triwari, Herda Hutabarat, Matthew Godfrey
Freshwater Tortoise Session	Chuck Shaffer
Fisheries Interaction Session	Paolo Casale
Indigenous Session	Matthew Godfrey, Lisa Campbell, Kartik Shanker, Nicolas Pilcher
Student Awards	Anders Rhodin, Lisa Campbell, Jeanette Wyneken
Travel Committee Chair	Jeff Seminoff
Travel Committee	Brendan Godley, Angela Fromia, Karen Eckert, Alan Bolten, Ana Barragan, Nicolas Pilcher
Tagging Workshop	Brendan Godley, Matthew Godfrey, Nicolas Pilcher
Parliamentarian	Frank Paladino

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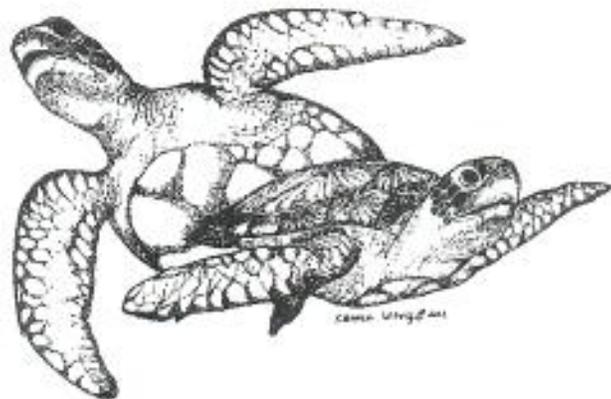
STUDENT AWARDS- 2003

Biology Paper (runner up)	Fulvio Maffucci , Zoological Station of Naples: "Trace elements accumulation and tissue distribution in loggerhead turtles from the Western Mediterranean Sea".
Biology Paper (Winner)	Rusty Day , College of Charleston: "Mercury in loggerhead sea turtles in the southeast US: assessing health impacts and developing monitoring strategies".
Biology Poster (Winner)	Eduardo Amir Cuevas Flores , Universidad de Merida: "Mapping and characterizing foraging habitat of immature hawksbill turtles in front of the biosphere reserve Ria Lagartos, Yucatan, Mexico".
Conservation Paper (Winner)	Yianna Samuel , Cornell University: "Underwater noise and anthropogenic disturbance in critical sea turtle habitat".
Conservation Poster (Winner)	Cathi Campbell , University of Florida: "Assessment of the Tortuguero, Costa Rica green turtle population".



NOAA Technical Memorandum NMFS-SEFSC-536

**PROCEEDINGS
OF THE TWENTY-THIRD ANNUAL
SYMPOSIUM ON SEA TURTLE BIOLOGY
AND CONSERVATION**



**“Living with
Turtles”**

17 to 21 March 2003, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Compiled by: Nicolas J. Pilcher

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
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National Marine Fisheries Service
Southeast Fisheries Science Center
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