

VELADOR

Science-Based Sea Turtle Conservation Since 1959

Issue 1, 2014

The Louisiana Challenge for Sea Turtles



Photo © Mike Ellis

As this issue of the Velador goes to press, our staff is preparing to attend the 34th International Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation in New Orleans. This annual meeting has been held in various locales in the United States, as well as

overseas, but this year marks the first time our international community has come together in Louisiana, a state that is infamous for its sea turtle conservation problems.

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Member Spotlight

Rebecca G.

Ten-year-old Rebecca G. of Florida saw her first sea turtle when she was only 6 months old. Her mom says it was like “love at first sight!” and that Rebecca has been passionate about protecting sea turtles ever since. The determined sixth grader committed herself to conservation at a very young age and regularly takes actions to help turtles. In past years, she has written letters to the media to educate the community, held a Sea Turtle House Party to raise money for sea turtle conservation, participated in numerous beach clean-ups and sea turtle walks, and even adopted Tour de Turtles competitor (and winner!) Calypso Blue II, a leatherback sponsored by Atlantis, Paradise Resort, for her school class. Rebecca says her favorite sea turtle is the leatherback because they are so huge and so rare to spot here in Florida but she works to protect all turtles!



Rebecca standing with her sea turtle mural on the Seminole Wekiva Springs Trail.

In October 2013, she started on a very special sea turtle project with Florida-based artist Jeff Sonsken as part of his “Paint the Trail” project in Longwood, Florida. Rebecca wanted to create a sea turtle mural in memory of slain Costa Rican conservationist Jairo Mora Sandoval, who was tragically killed last summer. Artist Sonsken made a “paint-by-numbers” design for Rebecca to fill in. Upon its completion, it was hung on the fence lining part of the Seminole Wekiva Springs Trail. STC Communications Coordinator Lexie Beach was there to meet Rebecca and see the completed mural. On this day, Rebecca also presented STC with a \$100 donation that she had raised through her numerous fundraising efforts.

Most recently, Rebecca has sold turtle cookies and lemonade at her lemonade stand to raise money for the Billion Baby Turtles campaign. She also made a pledge with STC on Giving Tuesday to “teach at least one other person about sea turtles.” Her proudest accomplishment as of late is

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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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... from cover

With extensive fishing grounds, Louisiana is the largest U.S. producer of shrimp. Louisiana waters also provide important feeding, developmental and migratory habitat for loggerheads, Kemp's ridleys and green turtles, all of which are listed as threatened or endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The drowning of sea turtles in U.S. shrimp trawls was first identified as a major problem in the 1970s. In the mid-1980s the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) finally adopted comprehensive turtle excluder device (TED) requirements and other measures to ensure sea turtles could escape drowning in shrimp nets, but implementation was held up for several years due to Congressional delays and multiple legal challenges, including several brought by the State of Louisiana. In 1987 the Louisiana legislature enacted Revised Statutes 56:57.2 to prohibit game wardens from the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries from enforcing federal TED regulations, citing "there is little information to conclude that shrimping is a significant causal factor in sea turtle mortality."

Shortly after, federal regulations finally went into effect in all state and federal waters from the Virginia-North Carolina state line to the border of Texas and Mexico. Nevertheless, unlike all other shrimping states in the region, Louisiana has avoided having to enforce these regulations by refusing to enter into a Joint Enforcement Agreement with NMFS allowing federal enforcement agents to work in state waters. In early 2010, NMFS informed Louisiana that it would not be receiving its annual federal allotment of \$400,000 to enforce fisheries regulations for all species.

Later that year, the state legislature, working with the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, recognized the need to advance sustainability programs for saltwater and freshwater fish resources and to



repeal the prohibition on state enforcement of federal TED laws. With bi-partisan support, the legislature passed H.B. 1334. Unfortunately, on June 29, 2010 Governor Bobby Jindal vetoed the bill out of concern that "fishing communities and industry" did not have time to give input.

A huge body of evidence proves the value of TEDs in saving sea turtles from drowning and in improving fishing efficiency for shrimpers. TEDs eject debris such as tires from nets, reduce the capture of unwanted fin fish and therefore lower the time needed to sort through the catch on deck, and reduce fuel consumption. The result is cleaner shrimp catches with less disruption of the marine ecosystem. TEDs in U.S. waters have been credited with aiding the increase of the endangered Kemp's ridley nesting populations in Mexico and the United States and have had a positive impact on all other species of sea turtles.

STC believes that conservationists now have an excellent opportunity to significantly change TED regulations in Louisiana. Lack of TED enforcement is a major problem, but attention to what is happening and the growing interest in sustainable fisheries should benefit sea turtles. In particular, sustainable seafood labeling is new for shrimp marketing and could be very helpful in leveraging TED enforcement. New tools create opportunities: in 2013 the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch put all wild-caught Louisiana shrimp and any Gulf shrimp caught with skimmer trawls on its red "Avoid" list because of critical conservation threats to sea turtles. As 1,000 sea turtle biologists and conservationists descend on New Orleans, we look forward to meeting with fishermen, working with the media and reaching out to the Governor's Office and Department of Natural Resources in an effort to enhance sea turtle conservation. 🌊

By Marydele Donnelly
Director of International Policy

winning a short story contest called “Let’s Write Together.” Her story, about a little girl who saves a sea turtle and is inspired to start beach clean ups as an annual family vacation activity, will be published in a book along with several other stories by Florida children this February. After the book is published, Rebecca plans to travel to local libraries to read excerpts from her story to promote sea turtle awareness.

Jeanean & Nathan V.

Jeanean V. and her son Nathan have been Members and supporters of STC since 2005. In the summer of 2013, Nathan, who has an interest in conservation and marine biology, shadowed STC’s Technology and Research Specialist Dan Evans during the Tour de Turtles release in Melbourne Beach, Florida. This was a great opportunity for Nathan, a high school sophomore, to see one aspect of the world of sea turtle conservation.

However, Nathan isn’t the only sea turtle fan in the family. Jeanean, a school nurse at Shiloh Hills Elementary in Pennsylvania, recently got her students involved with STC in an unexpected way. After learning about STC’s drive for candy wrappers through our Facebook page, Nurse V. gave her kids a challenge: fill up a huge steel drum with candy wrappers and she would adopt a sea turtle for them. The students, excited about the opportunity to help sea turtles and to adopt a turtle of their own, rose to the occasion in stellar fashion. The students of Shiloh Hills Elementary went to work to collect their candy wrappers and were able to recycle almost 1,300 wrappers—that’s almost 10 pounds!

Sea Turtle Conservancy sent the wrappers to a recycling company called TerraCycle to be processed and recycled (or upcycled) into new products. This partnership with TerraCycle

benefits sea turtles both through financial donations from shipments that STC, and Members such as Jeanean, send in and by keeping plastic and other waste out of the ocean and landfills. Marine plastic is an ever-present threat to sea turtles and other marine animals. The more we can recycle or upcycle the better.

True to her word, Jeanean adopted satellite-tagged turtle Claire for the entire school to track. Claire, a loggerhead sponsored by Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund, was one of the turtles that Nathan helped to release during the 2013 Tour de Turtles.

A huge thank you to Nathan, Jeanean and all of the kids at Shiloh Hills!



Students of Shiloh Hills Elementary collected nearly 1,300 wrappers.

For more information on how to adopt a turtle please visit <http://www.adoptaseaturtle.php>. To start your own TerraCycle drive to support STC contact Becca Gelwicks, Membership Coordinator at Becca@conserveturtles.org. Be sure to “Like” us on Facebook to learn about more opportunities to help sea turtles through TerraCycle and similar collection drives. 🐢

By Lexie Beach
Communications Coordinator
&
Becca Gelwicks
Membership Coordinator

Eco-Volunteering: The Adventure of a Lifetime



A late nesting green turtle returning to the ocean in early morning.

© Ralph Pace

Sea Turtle Conservancy's Costa Rica-based Eco-Volunteer Program is a unique and educational way to travel while also contributing to conservation efforts. One of the features that make Costa Rica unique is its rare and abundant wildlife. On this trip, Eco-Volunteers not only have a chance to view protected and threatened animals but to actually help those animals survive and thrive in the wild. STC's Eco-Volunteer Programs are designed to get participants up close and personal with sea turtles through supervised, hands-on opportunities such as nest monitoring and turtle tracking. Read on for a first-hand account of Sea Turtle Conservancy's Eco-Volunteer Program, written by recent Eco-Volunteer Heather Suffron.

"So there I was, hiking along the beach in the middle of the night, large caliper in hand, as the hot tropical breeze rushed against my face while I searched with my patrol partners for sea turtle tracks in the sand and felt the need to pinch myself for the umpteenth time to make sure I wasn't dreaming. But it wasn't a dream, though it very much felt like one. Nor was it an episode of Planet Earth or National Geographic or Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom, though it felt like one. I was

actually walking the beach while the Caribbean surf splashed at my side, and the moon illuminated the night sky as we scanned the sand. And I was actually working to help monitor, protect, and gather data on these magnificent creatures as an Eco-Volunteer with the Sea Turtle Conservancy (STC)!

Having chosen to take some time off work to participate in various volunteer projects around the world, I was in the midst of my week with STC on the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica. I researched and chose each of my projects based on location, type of volunteer work, cost, integrity and effectiveness of the program, and I could not have been happier with my experience with STC.

I participated as an Eco-Volunteer at the field station in Tortuguero, an incredibly unique and sensitive location that serves as nesting habitat for green, leatherback, hawksbill and the occasional loggerhead sea turtle - all of which are either threatened or endangered species.

Participants in the Eco-Volunteer program can join for one to three weeks, and there is often a birding research option, as well. Each sea turtle nesting season, a group of Research Assistants (RAs)

live and work at the field station for three months at a time. As an Eco-Volunteer, I, too, stayed at the field station in a very clean and well-appointed research residence and was welcomed into the fold.

While there, I participated in a number of nighttime beach patrols, as well as a few early morning track surveys. This is truly on-the-ground, hands-on work with the RAs; we checked nesting turtles for tags and general health, measured their shells and logged the data during beach patrols, counted new tracks and monitored a number of nests during the track surveys.

Getting to know the coordinators and RAs was an additional joy. They were full of life, energy and ideas, and are clearly interested in, and dedicated to, helping protect the planet and its wildlife.

Working with turtles is an experience I will simply never forget. The females frequently return to the




STC Research Assistant working with a nesting green sea turtle

© Ralph Pace

... nests, and the experience of watching tiny baby sea turtles make their way across the beach to dip their flippers in the sea for the first time is pretty powerful and special!

... I was also able to learn more about STC's efforts within the community. In addition to research on the beach, the STC staff and RAs are involved in community outreach efforts, environmental education, and ongoing discussions with local groups and organizations. With time and continued advocacy, I think even more progress will be made towards further preservation efforts.

All in all, I had a thrilling experience while with STC - and one in which I felt very involved. It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for me, and I'm so glad I took it!"

STC has available Eco-Volunteer opportunities for leatherback turtles, green turtles, and birding. Eco-Volunteers must be 18 years or older (16 years or older accompanied by an adult). This experience is ideal for educators, couples, spring breakers, groups, or anyone who is interested in helping sea turtles and making a difference. Eco-Volunteer Programs run from March through October. Options include 1, 2 and 3 week sessions. For more info, visit STC's Eco-Volunteer page online at <http://www.conserveturtles.org/volunteer-research-programs.php> 



Green sea turtle hatchlings emerging from a nest in Tortuguero, Costa Rica

same beach at which they were born in order to lay their own eggs, nesting several times in the same season. They are amazing creatures, and I felt truly humbled and honored to be working with them and getting to do things that most travelers and tourists never have the opportunity to try.

Furthermore, I was incredibly fortunate to be there when a number of hatchlings emerged from their

Adopted Turtles Return to Tortuguero

From July to September each year, Sea Turtle Conservancy researchers tag and collect data on the green turtles that nest on the beaches of Tortuguero, Costa Rica. Since these turtles are not tracked via satellite, STC keeps adoptive “parents” informed when their turtles are spotted nesting in Tortuguero. The “parents” of the turtles are listed below:

Lurrie Amos	William Shawn Franklin	Shannon McCabe	Stephen Simpson
John Andrew	Michael Fried	Kim McCall-Faienza	Nancy Sivy
Helene Artaud	Betty & Wallace Friend	Deanne McKenna	Miranda Smit
Rebecca Artley	Nina & Nadine Galle	Brittany McKenzie	Jean Smith
Fabricio Atenico	Linda Lea Garber	Taylor Means	Beata Sokolowska
Luc Bakx	Kari & Alex Gardner	Tamara Meijer	Edward Staszak
Lyndcee Barragato	Jenny Garman	Sydney and Eli Melet	Barbara Stein
Mariette Batenburg	Emersyn Garrison	Jessica Melman	Karel, Ans, Caro & Ray Stein
Peter & Eluira Berger	Sylvia Gentner	Fritz Miller	Alexandra Steiner
Tim & Kathy Blade	Bianca Geradts	Miss Harrington’s Science	Mary Strang
Sandra Bombers	Christina Gonzalez	Classes	Alicia Stratton
Hyke Bouma	Michelle Goutier	Mindy Mohr	Katie Sturino
Rob & Marjan Bouwmeester	Brooklyn Eileen	Adolf Mok (2 turtles)	Sondra Sykes
Mark Brady	Groesbeck	Kavita Mokha	Jessica Tai (6 turtles)
Emma Brandt	Stefan Haese	Jan Montgomery	Julie Thompson
Ava Breck Robinson	Denise Handrigan	Christopher Mowrey	Thomas Thornhill
Cole Broderick	Pamala Hanlin	Mrs. Butchart’s Class	Matthew Toquero
Corina Brouwer	Janet Harding	Mrs. Donnelly & Mrs. O’Neil	Shraddha Trehan
Michele Buis	Jolein Harro	Therese Murray	Zoe, Tiffany & Nicole Trujillo
Edith Burggraaff-de Graff	Lily Hatzenbeler	Josh Napial	Kathleen Tsai
Sierra Bustya	David Henige	Wendy Oldenburg	William & Angelica Turley
Ellen Tillemans & Kylie	Matthew & Christopher	Barbara Omura	Sophie Urban
Calabrese	Hogan	Jose Miguel Ordax Cassa	Maarten Van Bokhorst
Michael Callerd	Juanita Hubbard	Sarla Parmar	Fam Van der Asdonk
Rita Chambers	Kai William Hughes	Joyce Pascua	Diane Van der Kooij
Sing Chan	Rick & Betsy Ilfeld	Cindalee Penney-Hall	Linda Van der Werff
Ashley Chandler	Halley Isberg	Jennifer Petty	Gretha en Ido Van Dijk
Cassie Clark	Larry Jensen	Anna Potts	Piast Van Welie
Emma & Yuo Coninx	Julie Joynor	Rita Primmer	Mario & Marianne Van
Amy Cooper	Deborah Kalikow	Jenna Pugrant	Zanten
Anthony Cordova	Toby & Abraham Kalker	Kaitlyn Pyle	Melanie Veldtman-Klaasen
Everard van Zoelen Cortes	Vickie Kane	E.W. Ramakers	Vincent & Sophie Verstraete-
Kelley Crawford	Sandy Kawamoto	Jim Rapf	Van Nevez
Aaron Crowell	Nathalie Kelm	Eilene Recupero	David Vidal
Paige Crowhurst	Caitlin Keng	Mary Reimel	Pieter Vriesendorp
Meghan Davis & Barbara Bell	The Kessel Family	Michelle Reynaud	Michaela W.
Vera de Graaf	Meike Koopmans	Juanita & Grant Roberts	Kate Elizabeth Walkup
Keimpe De Jong	Sharon Kotsovos	Kaite Robinette	Quirine Wentink
Sue De Silva	Rinie Lamers	Jefferson & Jordan Rodgers	Jennifer Weston
Franc De Vos	Hans & Riet Laponder	Liz & Doug Rowan	Karen Wilcynski
Marit De vos	Annebet Leagre	Meghan Ruwet	Lexi Wiles
Tana Delalio	Tiffany Lee	Walter & Patricia Ryan	Hugo & Monique Willems
Aninda Dhar	Nathalie Lenders	Sam Sabbah	Dennis Wilson
Kim Diepstraten	Dennis Linder	Alex Sadai	David Wilson
Gioia Dolmetsch	Allison Loftis	Sylviane Sadeg	Bill Wing
Quinn Dube	Loyola Marymount Univ.	Silvia Sanchez Martin	Rudy & Tinet Yanssens
Anungoo Dugaraa	Fen Lu	Nora Schadee	Cindy Zweijtzer
Jaidon Eisenpress	Teresa Lund	Anette Adducci Schmit	Bryson & Amelie
Andrew Ellison	Nano Lutfi	Lydia & Ed Schoenmeier	Chantal & Marice
Ray Eyselshoven	H. Maas	Katie & Trevor Scholl	Johnny & Renske
Erin Fagan	Jenny Mahne	Schuivens Family	
Madeline Flinn	David Mahon	Stephanie Schulte Eickholt	
Xochilt Valdivia Ford	Deanna Mankle	Christine Schuster	
Patty Foret	Eduardo Mateo Zenón	William Quinn Siegl-Gesin	



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Printed with vegetable based inks on recycled paper that is PCF and ECF.

Monthly Giving

Support Sea Turtles this Earth Day!

April 22 is Earth Day, a day intended to inspire appreciation for the environment and raise awareness about environmental issues. The first Earth Day was held on April 22, 1970, and the movement to celebrate the environment has grown into a global event and a call to action to protect it.

If you are looking for a meaningful way to help protect sea turtles and their habitats this Earth Day, 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 green turtle program at Tortuguero.

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.

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. And if you are already a Turtle Guardian, thank you, and please consider recruiting a friend to become one, too!

