

TOUR DE TURTLES – USING RESEARCH TO INCREASE AWARENESS ABOUT SEA TURTLES ONLINE

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The Tour de Turtles Migration Marathon is a popular educational program that is increasing public awareness and support for the conservation of sea turtles and their habitats. Started in 2008, Tour de Turtles is a fun, educational journey through the science, research and geography of sea turtle migration using satellite telemetry. Created by the Sea Turtle Conservancy, this 3-month-long online program follows the migration of sea turtles from their nesting beaches to unknown foraging grounds. Tour de Turtles utilizes satellite telemetry data from migration studies in Florida, conducted in partnership with the University of Central Florida, and from STC's research programs in Central America and the Caribbean. After departing from some of the most important nesting sites in the Western Hemisphere, individual sea turtles are tracked and their locations and distances traveled are uploaded to interactive maps on the Tour de Turtles website, www.tourdeturtles.org. The turtles are competing with the goal of being the first to swim the furthest distance during the marathon. Tour de Turtles also includes a secondary competition, the Causes Challenge, to raise awareness about threats to sea turtle survival. Audiences, particularly educators and students, are invited to learn more about each turtle competitor and their Cause with the goal of promoting positive actions on behalf of sea turtles. Each year Tour de Turtles generates considerable public interest in sea turtles and, during just a three month period, inspires more than 30,000 visitors to log onto the Tour de Turtles website. In addition to reaching the general public and media outlets, the program provides educational resources to teachers across the United States, with hundreds of new educators signing up each year. Tour de Turtles includes a full suite of activities focusing on the biology and habitats of sea turtles. Teachers have free access to educational materials, quizzes and lesson plans that easily incorporate environmental education into classroom activities and lessons. The ultimate goal of Tour de Turtles is to raise awareness about the different species of sea turtles and the various threats to their survival. With an estimated one out of 1,000 hatchlings reaching adulthood, conservation must focus on combating human-caused threats. Using information gained through Tour de Turtles, the public will be better equipped to take action and reduce threats to the sea turtles.