Editor’s Note

SWOT Goes Green

Sure, we use Forest Stewardship Council–certified paper in the production of *SWOT Report* and encourage people to download it from the Internet to save a tree, but when I say that “SWOT goes green,” the “green” I am talking about is the green turtle! *SWOT Report, Vol. VI*, which you hold in your hands (or are reading at www.SeaTurtleStatus.org), presents the first up-to-date global map of the biogeography of the last sea turtle in our species-focused series—the green turtle. The green turtle is arguably the most studied, the most iconic, and, as suggested on our cover, the most valuable of all sea turtles, for reasons that you will soon discover as you read Peter Pritchard’s Special Feature article on page 24.

With the addition of the green turtle to the SWOT database, data on all seven species are now flowing in annually from more than 500 sources that represent more than 2,000 nesting beaches around the world. The SWOT database, housed within Duke University’s Ocean Biogeographic Information System–Spatial Ecological Analysis of Megavertebrate Populations (OBIS-SEAMAP), has become the most comprehensive resource of its kind.

We have learned a great deal since starting SWOT back in 2004. Our first global mapping effort (of leatherbacks, in *SWOT Report, Vol. I*, 2006), and subsequent visits to nesting beach projects around the world, made us aware of some major challenges in presenting complete, accurate, and comparable information. As data sheets were submitted, and as we walked the beaches with SWOT partners in South America, the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia, we soon realized that nearly every project uses somewhat different techniques and protocols to monitor sea turtle nesting activity. It became clear that SWOT would have to achieve a greater level of comparability among beaches, to improve data quality overall, and to help projects meet a minimum standard that would enable the projects, and SWOT, to one day monitor local and global trends. Thus was born the SWOT Minimum Data Standards project (see the article on page 47) that has now brought together some of the world’s top sea turtle biologists and statisticians to design practical standards for sea turtle nesting beach monitoring.

We also saw that people in the field needed help to achieve their conservation goals and that *SWOT Report* was a useful tool to that end. However, using the tool required some financial assistance. So we developed a small grants program to support projects pursuing conservation in the field. To date, we have made grants to 31 SWOT Team partners in 18 different countries and have seen marvelous and innovative programs take shape as a result. In 2010, we expanded the scope of this program to include not just education and outreach programs, but also research, capacity building, and networking programs (see the article on page 48). Our dream is to secure funding to vastly grow this highly effective small grants program.

Like the tiny hatchling green turtle in the incredible photo by Jérôme Bourjea (at left), SWOT started small, but we aspire to be something much bigger. We pledged to support the sea turtle and ocean conservation movement by adopting a planetwide perspective and helping to develop a network of people, a global database on sea turtle biogeography, and a strategy to improve and guide conservation. Each year, we have taken on these tasks one small step at a time, and today, we are beginning to realize our goals.

Whether you are a data contributor, photographer, writer, or donor, or merely a fan, thanks for being a part of our SWOT Team and for helping to support sea turtles and the health of their ocean homes.

**Editor’s Note**

**AT LEFT: Near the island of La Réunion in the southwest Indian Ocean, SWOT Team member Jérôme Bourjea was witnessing a rare open-water hatching encounter, when a humpback whale and her calf appeared on the scene. © JÉRÔME BOURJEA**

Roderic B. Mast