Editor’s Note
It’s about WAY more than just turtles ...

If you’re like me, you’ve probably walked into the room and heard, “Hey, it’s the turtle guy (or girl)!” more times than you can recall. When I worked on my first turtle beach in Georgia (U.S.A.), “Turtle Boy” was my actual job title. Like it or not, that moniker has stuck with me for decades. I’m not complaining, because it provides me with a perfect opening to start a dialogue about my favorite topic. The conversations usually begin with a litany of queries: “How old do turtles get?” “Do they migrate?” “Where do the baby turtles go?” “Are turtles endangered?”—and other frequently asked questions that many in our community encounter daily. As a handy tool to prepare us for such questions, this volume of *SWOT Report* introduces a new section called “FAQs about Sea Turtles” (p. 36), in which we ask experts some of the common questions that are often not so easy to answer.

When the questions we are asked go beyond the curious mysteries and basic natural history traits of sea turtles, they sometimes touch on more profound issues such as: “Does it really matter if we have sea turtles on our planet? After all, the dinosaurs went extinct, and here we are”; or “Now that the status of many sea turtles appears to be improving, isn’t your job done?”; or “Aren’t there more important species to worry about?” Such questions give us the amazing opportunity to explain why our work as sea turtle girls and guys is so globally important.

Sea turtles are integral components of healthy oceans. They fill countless ecological niches, some of which no other creatures occupy. Healthy oceans mean a healthy planet and healthy humans too. So, when I am asked if sea turtles are worthy of conservation attention, I remind people that as long as we breathe air, drink water, eat food, and enjoy a livable climate—services provided by healthy oceans in which healthy populations of turtles thrive—then, yes, they do matter.

Our jobs as turtle folk are not insignificant but rather are among the most noble of endeavors in the 21st century—when human survival on Earth hangs in the balance. Our cooperation as a global sea turtle community, through SWOT and other conveners, is absolutely fundamental to achieving the synergy needed to meet the irrefutable requirement to save the oceans. In the words of another “sea turtle guy,”

“The sea, the great unifier, is man’s only hope. Now, as never before, the old phrase has a literal meaning: we are all in the same boat.”

— Jacques Cousteau

Roderic B. Mast
Turtle Boy

AT LEFT: A female leatherback turtle in a freshwater river behind Grande Riviere Beach on Trinidad’s north coast. © MICHAEL PATRICK O’NEILL