



Ostional, Costa Rica – The legal egg harvest during olive ridley arribadas at Ostional, Costa Rica, is controversial, and past images have misrepresented the people, depicting them as environmental terrorists. Given that, it was surprising how warmly I was welcomed into the community. I wanted to make a picture that reflected the direct link between sea turtles and the community, so I adjusted my altitude by perching on a ladder. Thereby I framed the shot so that the people and turtles occupied the same space, with neither species dominating the other. © Thomas P. Peschak

→ SEE MORE PHOTOS AND STORIES FROM TOM ON PAGES 14–23.

Editor's Note

Capturing Moments

Nestling into the chilly beach at midnight, waiting for a turtle to emerge, brought back fond memories of many such peaceful nights that I spent as a researcher—the rhythmic crashing of waves, the smell of moist sand, and the sounds of the jungle nearby. But on this night the goal was not to count, tag, or measure but rather to capture a moment. At my side was Thomas Peschak, crouched behind the tool of his trade, a tripod-mounted camera specially modified by National Geographic engineers to capture the invisible ultraviolet light of night. Tom had the image he sought in his mind, facing west with clouds obscuring the moon, framed by forest to the left, and with the upturned hull of a shipwreck to the right. There we waited for the space between to be filled by a nesting leatherback that was certain to appear. At Grand Riviere, Trinidad, as many as 400 females can nest in a night. There were already several females around us—coming, going, digging, laying, covering—but none were yet inside the frame of the photograph to be. We had to wait with patience, another tool of Tom's trade, for the moment in which the physical setting, the invisible light, the movement of the waves, and the subject herself conspired to match his mind's vision. While we waited, we talked about his quest to photograph sea turtles differently than any photographer before. His compelling story and photos come to life herein (pp. 14–23).

Capturing moments with our far-flung sea turtle colleagues has been hard during the COVID-19 pandemic that upended the world just days after our last volume of *SWOT Report* was shipped to Colombia for the 38th Annual Sea Turtle Symposium that, sadly, never happened. Our global clan—accustomed to gathering in throngs each year to meet friends; to share science and stories; and to hug, laugh, dance, and recharge—was denied that joy in 2020 by a deadly virus.

Nevertheless, we were able to cope and to pivot. Our SWOT team found new ways to package and share content online, from Volume XV itself, to Expert Q&A articles, webinars, and more. We helped build new networks such as 'Team BEACH' to more effectively influence the human behaviors that result in healthy oceans and sea turtles. We even had some fun with things such as Seaturtleology, an online quiz game that ranks sea turtles' experiences and challenges us all to do and see more. Visit www.SeaTurtleStatus.org today, and you will find a more vibrant SWOT hub than ever before. Many of our SWOT team members worldwide also adapted to meet the challenges of COVID-19, and we have shared some of their stories on pp. 40–45 of this volume.

SWOT was not cowed by COVID-19 to shy away from our audacious goals—such as a global overview and the first comprehensive maps in more than a decade of the world's most abundant sea turtle species, the olive ridley (see pp. 24–33), an effort that brought together dozens of top experts and hundreds of data contributors. We are also proud to have continued our annual small grants program in this challenging year, providing much needed support to a dozen conservation programs worldwide (pp. 48–51).

The past year brought pain and setbacks, including the loss of dear friends and loved ones (pp. 58–59), but we were inspired by the incredible resilience of our global sea turtle community in meeting these challenges, and we have renewed optimism for sea turtles and for those of us who work to conserve them on a healthy planet.

Roderic B. Mast
Chief Editor