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## Atlantic Leatherback Strategy Retreat at St Catherines Island

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### Introduction

A group of 18 Atlantic leatherback researchers and conservationists met at St Catherines Island, Georgia, USA, January 15-18, 2005.

The objectives of the meeting were to:

- 1) Assess the level of knowledge about Atlantic leatherback turtles
- 2) Identify nesting beaches and in-water conservation and research priorities for Atlantic leatherback turtles. Presentations given at the event and additional background information are available at <<http://www.cccturtle.org/leatherbacks>>.

The meeting recommendations are reported below.

### Nesting beaches - Conservation and Research Priorities

- **Atlantic Africa**
  - Conduct detailed surveys of nesting distribution from Mauritania to Angola, with special priority given to Cote d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea (Bioko Island), Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Angola.
  - Determine the importance of the Gabon and Congo nesting aggregations.
  - Support and/or initiate local conservation efforts at significant nesting locations.
  - Strengthen and implement legislation that regulates conservation and use of sea turtles.
  - Assess human impact on nesting aggregations.
- **Trinidad/Guianas**
  - Conduct a collaborative effort to assess overall distribution, size and trend of the regional population.
  - Standardize PIT tag use and instrumentation, phase in same brand of tags at all beaches.
- **Reduce killing of female turtles on nesting beaches**
  - Priority should be given to Tiger and Gwennie beaches in Guyana, Sixaola and San San beaches in Panama, Tobago beaches, beaches in Atlantic Africa, for example; in Congo and Angola.
- **Reduce or eliminate egg collection**
  - Eliminate commercial egg collection.
  - Initiate long-term relationships with local communities to identify joint conservation actions.

- **Determine relationships among life-history, oceanic and climatic conditions, and human interventions for Atlantic and Pacific nesting aggregations**

- Convene multi-disciplinary conference including oceanographers, physiologists, sea turtle biologists, statisticians/modelers.
- Determine mechanisms for testing the efficacy of sea turtle conservation actions.

- **Complete the determination of the genetic structure of Atlantic populations**

- Collect additional genetic samples from Caribbean Islands and Atlantic Africa nesting aggregations.

### In-water - Research and Conservation Priorities

- 1) Establish a regional research program to define habitat utilization, especially in the East and South Atlantic where there is significant exposure to fisheries. Once these key regions are identified, there should be two immediate goals: the first is to reduce mortality resulting from fisheries interactions by increasing fishermen awareness on handling/release protocols and conservation awareness; the second goal is to reduce fisheries interactions through the development of new gear technologies and fishing practices.
- 2) Implement new and/or enhance existing observer programs onboard fishing vessels operating in the Atlantic to support a comprehensive assessment of fishery effort and sea turtle interactions.
- 3) Given that we are trying to learn about the interactions of specific nesting colonies with particular fisheries, it is recommended that the research on the suitability of color coded external tags (Floy tags) be undertaken to aid in recognition of recaptured turtles that may or may not have been pit tagged.
- 4) Establishment of a system of regular and open communication, such as a specific listserve and an annual gathering, to support greater collaboration, information sharing, and technical assistance among Atlantic leatherback researchers and conservationists.

- 5) Encourage the FAO to expedite the adoption of means to reduce leatherback-fisheries interactions (including new gear technologies) and the reporting of leatherback status. (In accordance with recent outcomes of the FAO Technical Consultation Bangkok, 2004).
- 6) Encourage all trawl fisheries operating in the Atlantic where leatherback turtles are impacted to adopt the use of TEDs that exclude leatherback turtles.

- 7) Encourage all states in the Atlantic that are not signatories to the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles (IAC) or the CMS MoU for Atlantic Africa to sign and ratify those instruments.

*Acknowledgements:* The Retreat was organized by Caribbean Conservation Corporation and the St Catherines Island Foundation. Additional financial support was provided by Hubbs-Sea World Research Institute, Ocean Foundation and Winn Foundation. Scott Eckert and Felix Moncada provided useful information on leatherback turtles in Trinidad and Cuba. A full report on the event is available at <<http://www.cccturtle.org/leatherbacks>>.

## **Séptima Reunión Anual del Grupo Tortuguero: ¡Revolución Tortuguera!**

**Kama Dean**

*Co-Director, Pro Peninsula (E-mail: [kama@propeninsula.org](mailto:kama@propeninsula.org))*

The 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Grupo Tortuguero (GT7) was held January 28-30, 2005 in Loreto, Baja California Sur, Mexico. The theme of this year's meeting - ¡Revolución Tortuguera! - reflects the mission of the Grupo Tortuguero to empower people and their communities to conserve sea turtles, inspiring a revolution in our relationship with the ocean. The meeting has grown from a small gathering of 45 peninsula residents who wanted to save sea turtles in 1999, to the region's premiere grassroots conservation meeting.

### *Focus on Community*

GT7 was held in the historic center of Loreto, utilizing local hotels, restaurants and open spaces. We wanted to foster economic activity within the community of Loreto, as well as give participants an opportunity to get to know and understand the beauty and history of Loreto. The central location of the meeting, as well as the use of local businesses, added to the grassroots feel of the meeting and highlighted the importance of community in conservation.

Over 300 people attended GT7 - more than ever before! Participants came from all over the Baja California peninsula, mainland Mexico and the U.S., and represented communities, grassroots and international organizations, government agencies, businesses, cultural societies, universities and research institutions. This unique blend of fishermen, scientists, students and activists is what sets this meeting apart; it is truly a diverse group of individuals connected by a common goal: bringing healthy sea turtle populations back to the Eastern Pacific.

### *The Orantes Prize: Celebrating Native Cultures*

This year members of two indigenous groups, the Seri community of Sonora and the Nahuatl community of Colola, Michoacan, were chosen to receive the Don Manuel Orantes Conservation Award. The award is named after one of the pioneers of sea turtle conservation on the peninsula, and is given at the meeting each year for outstanding conservation work. Thanks to the efforts of Pro Peninsula staff, our funders, and the communities themselves, five members of the Seri

community and three members of the Nahuatl community were present to accept their awards and celebrate their work along the Pacific coast of Mexico to rescue the black sea turtle.

### *1<sup>st</sup> Encuentro para Niños*

In order to include the next generation of sea turtle protectors, this year a separate youth conference ran concurrent to the adult conference. The encuentro was an overwhelming success! Close to 40 youth participated in the conference and learned about the life of sea turtles, created turtle murals, performed plays and songs, and went on night monitoring walks searching for nesting turtles.

*Acknowledgements:* This year's meeting would not have been possible without the support of our sponsors and the tireless efforts of our volunteers- we thank you! Animal Alliance, Fernando Arcas and the GEA Staff, H. VIII Ayuntamiento de los Cabos, Barb Andrews, Baja Books and Maps, Blue Ocean Institute, George Binney Foundation, Ann Brownlee, California Academy of Sciences, Erika Castanon Moreno, Conservation International, Gayle and John Dean, Defenders of Wildlife, Stephen Delgado, Cecilia Fisher, Grupo Ecologista Antares, Mary Joy Harris, Heather Glass, Hermosa Beach Sister City Association, IEMANYA Oceanica, International Community Foundation, Journey Mexico, Tony and Linda Kinninger, Gabriela Llañez, Loreto Bay, Loreto Bay Foundaiton, David Maldonado Diaz, Carl Moczydlowsky, Peter Marquez, Bertha Montano, National Marine Fisheries Service, Melissa Pastón, Hoyt Peckham, PROBEA, ProCaguama, Programa para la Proteccion de la Tortuga Marina del Municipio de Los Cabos, B.C.S., Karen and Sasha Retford, Mark Spalding, Erin Spencer, Graciela Tiburcio, UABCS, Underwater Images, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Frances Velay and the Panaphil Foundation, Velas de Loreto S de RL de C.V., Wildcoast, Sam Wilks, World Wildlife Fund, Mexico, Annie Young, Darlene and Gray Tait.

For a list of participating communities, as well as the titles and summaries for all presentations, documentaries and workshops please contact Pro Peninsula at <[info@propeninsula.org](mailto:info@propeninsula.org)> to request a copy of the conference proceedings or visit <<http://www.propeninsula.org>>.