

REPORTS



REPORT FROM THE 34TH ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM ON SEA TURTLE BIOLOGY AND CONSERVATION, NEW ORLEANS, 10-17 APRIL 2014

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The 34th Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation was held in the City of New Orleans, USA on 10-17 April 2014. The theme of the symposium was “Cultures,” which honored the interactions between various cultures with sea turtle populations across time and geography. The symposium was held in conjunction with the Southeast Regional Sea Turtle Network. The structure of the symposium was similar to past symposia, with pre-symposium workshops and regional meetings, plus 3.5 days of symposium meetings. Overall, the meeting was a success from basically every perspective; details are offered below.

A total of 785 people from 73 countries registered for the Symposium. The venue for the symposium was the Marriott Hotel on Canal Street, New Orleans. A total of 176 oral papers and 273 posters were originally submitted to organizers. These original submissions included the highest number of oral presentations on in-water biology science ever submitted to a symposium, with a total of 35, or approximately 20% of all oral presentations originally submitted. Due to normal attrition associated with every symposium, in the end the symposium included a total of 158 oral presentations in general sessions and a total of 235 posters. Of the oral presentations, 32 (20%) corresponded to in-water biology research, more than any other category presented in this symposium.

Pre-symposium Workshops. Five workshops were offered the weekend before the symposium started. These were the Sea Turtle Rehabilitation and Health Workshop (with a total of 237 registered participants), the Educators Outreach Workshop (with 18 local, national and international participants), the Digital Marketing Workshop (with 83 participants), the GIS Workshop with 197 participants, and the Temperature-dependent Sex Determination Workshop (with 151 participants).

Pre-symposium Meetings. A total of eight Special Interest and Regional meetings were held the weekend prior to the main symposium presentations. These were the Terrapin, Tortoise & Freshwater Meeting, the RETOMALA, the

Africa Regional, the Mediterranean Regional, the East Asia Regional, Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia Regional, the Pacific Islands Region-Oceania, Eastern Pacific Hawksbill Initiative and the Marine Turtle Specialist Group. These meetings were successful and contributed to bring attendees early to the symposium.

Key Note Speakers. Three key note speakers delivered three 30-minute addresses to symposium participants. Jack Frazier’s presentation gave the audience a comprehensive overview of the topic Sea Turtles and Cultures, which nicely served to frame the theme of the symposium. Duncan MacKenzie immediately followed Jack’s presentation, speaking to the audience about the pros and cons of using sea turtles as animal models to conduct physiological studies. On the last day of the symposium, and after stripping down to his swimsuit, David Owens delivered an enthusiastic, informative and entertaining speech about the history of sea turtle research and the historical involvement of women in this research. All three addresses were excellent and very well received by the audience.

Symposium Sessions. This symposium included traditional sessions held at previous symposia, such as Anatomy, Physiology and Health; In-Water Biology Session (Ecology, Telemetry, Foraging, Behavior); Nesting Biology (Ecology, Behavior, and Reproductive Success), Population Biology and Monitoring (Status, Modeling, Demography, Genetics, Nesting Trends, In-Water Trends), Fisheries and Threats Session; Conservation, Management and Policy; Education, Outreach And Advocacy; and Social, Economic and Cultural Studies.

Two special sessions were also held during the symposium: Biology and Conservation of the Sea Turtles of the Gulf of Mexico and Collaborative Fisheries Research. As the title implies, the first session focused on work conducted in the Gulf of Mexico and was held the first day of the symposium. This session included papers from the entire Gulf (Mexican and US waters), and offered an emphasis on in-water work. The second special session on collaborative fisheries

focused on work being done by scientists in collaboration with fishermen to collect fisheries-specific information and promote effective conservation and management practices among fishermen.

Archie Carr Student Awards. There were 54 oral presentations and 92 poster presentations submitted by students for consideration in the Archie Carr Awards for Best Student Presentations. The winner for Best Biology Poster was Eric Parks and Runners-Up were Celine Mollet Saint Benoit and Cristian Ramirez-Gallego. Best Conservation Poster went to Meghan Gahm, and the Runner-Up was Kimberly Riskas. The Best Biology Oral was won by Cali Turner Tomaszewicz, and Runners-Up were Melanie Lopez-Castro and Nathan Robinson. The Best Conservation Oral winner was Jose Luis Crespo-Picazo, and Aliki Panagopoulou was Runner-Up. The judges who served in this competition were: Larisa Avens, Ana Barragan, Cathi Campbell, Wendy Dow Piniak, Mariana Fuentes, Marc Girondot, Caroline Good, Emma Harrison, Jen Keller, Cynthia Lagueux, Ann Marie Lauritsen, Kate Mansfield, Zoe Meletis, Dave Owens, Erin Seney and Brian Shamblin.

Business Meeting. Important issues were addressed during the plenary business meeting conducted the last day of the New Orleans symposium. One of the most important issues was the approval of the overhauled Constitution and Bylaws of the Society, which was approved by the membership promptly. Other issues discussed were the travel committee report, the Treasurer's report and the Resolutions submitted, among others.

Board Meeting. The Board meeting held during the New Orleans symposium was fruitful and lasted until midnight of the first day of the symposium. The Board received and discussed reports from the Nominations Committee, Student Committee, Travel Committee, Students Awards Committee, Awards Committee, as well as reports from the Treasurer and the Bylaws and Constitution Committee. The issue of Annual vs. Biennial symposia was discussed only briefly and was left for the annual Board retreat meeting in August to allow Board members to gather more information and be better prepared to discuss this issue in depth.

Social Events. Welcome Social, Live and Silent Auctions, Farewell party, Student Awards were some of the social events held during the symposium. Among those events, a Speed Chatting with Experts event was held the night of the first day of the meeting, with the following lineup: Nancy Mettee - Turtle Rehab and First aid in the Field; Roldán Valverde- Arribadas and Turtles of the Gulf of Mexico; Brad Nahill - Volunteering and Tourism; David Godfrey - NGO funding and Non-profit management issues; Anne

& Peter Meylan - In-water Turtle Research; T. Todd Jones - Physiological Ecology; Erin Seney - Consulting, fieldwork, and policy; Pamela Plotkin - Conservation Science; Robert Hardy - Satellite Tracking; Michael Jensen - Genetics; Jack Frazier - 'Hall of Fame.' Of all social events, the Welcome Social held the night before the first day of the symposium was probably the most popular. This included a surprise Mardi Gras-style parade with a second line Jazz band guiding symposium attendees over the streets of New Orleans.

Travel grants. A total of 119 registrants received a travel grant to the New Orleans symposium (12 from Africa, 13 from US/Canada, 5 from English-speaking Caribbean, 4 from South Asia, 8 from Asia Pacific, 16 from South America, 6 from Europe, 23 from Mexico-Central America, and 32 others). This level of travel grant awards represents about 15% of the total registered participants. Travel grants took the form of room grants, which was highly advantageous for the awardees and for the Society. Room awards contributed a total of about 561 room nights, which made a significant contribution to our hotel's room block. Because rooms were awarded to a group and not to individuals the organizing committee was able to serve more people in a more effective way. Also, this strategy saved our Treasurer the time and effort to write checks and keep track of the awards, and gave the Society better control over how the grants are assigned and used, thus increasing efficiency and effectiveness of the awards.

Awards. During the symposium, a series of awards were made to prominent members of our sea turtle society. Anne Meylan, Frank Paladino and Jim Richardson were awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award for their extensive and significant contributions to the promotion of sea turtle biology and conservation. Congratulations to the awardees. Resolutions. An important component of the every symposium is the issuing of Resolutions, documents that allow the Society at large to pronounce itself with regard to issues pertaining to sea turtle conservation around the world. Two highly important resolutions were passed during the New Orleans symposium: The first resolution was relayed to the Australian Minister of the Environment, the Hon Greg Hunt, regarding the protection of sea turtle populations in the Great Barrier Reef region. The second resolution was sent to the President of Mexico, Enrique Peña Nieto, and pertained to the protection of loggerheads in Baja California, Mexico. Receipt of the letters was acknowledged and press notices regarding these letters appeared in Australian and Mexican newspapers.

Finances. Society's finances were a major concern going into the New Orleans symposium. Indeed, during the plenary business meeting we learnt that the Society's

finances were in worse shape than originally thought. Fortunately, thoughtful planning by the Society's Board and effective execution by the organizing committee resulted in a successful symposium, both scientifically and financially. After paying for all our obligations incurred prior and during the symposium, our revenues were sufficient to overcome past debts and leave us in a solvent situation. Hopefully, the model developed for the New Orleans symposium will be adopted for future symposia.

The financial success achieved in New Orleans was due to a series of measures taken. For instance, historical but expensive items, such as simultaneous translation and exceedingly high travel grant levels were significantly reduced or eliminated. Also, the New Orleans symposium was held as a joint meeting with the Southeast Regional Sea Turtle Network, which eliminated any competition for resources. Additionally, important sponsorship was secured from major donors, such as Shell and the National Federation of Wildlife and Fisheries, as well as the Marine Turtle Conservation Act of the USFWS, and the National Atmospheric Aeronautic Administration. Also importantly, organizers were able to secure sponsorship from the Virginia Institute of Marine Science to cover all meeting expenses for one entire day of the Symposium (CFR session), which significantly reduced our costs. Significantly, the organizing committee was able to partner with Southeastern Louisiana University, which allowed us to receive tax-exempt status in Louisiana, among other measures. Finally, significant assistance from The Zenith Group, our contracted meeting provider, made it possible for us to realize significant savings on hotel expenses.

Memorial Tribute. During the closing ceremonies of the symposium, a simple memorial tribute was conducted to honor the lives of three colleagues who lost their lives since the last symposium. They are Jairo Mora (Costa Rica), Creusa "Tetha" Hitipieuw (Malaysia), George Petro (Vanuatu). Heartfelt words were pronounced by Didiher Chacón, Peter Dutton and Ken MacKay, respectively.

Acknowledgments. Organising the New Orleans symposium took a significant number of hours and effort. The successful organisation strongly benefits from the

selfless work of a large number of volunteers. To them, my personal thanks. However, among all the people that contributed one way or another to the success of the symposium, I would like to recognise the following five individuals: the symposium Registrar Rick Herren, who handled all registrations issues with utmost efficiency and dedication; program officers Elena Finkbeiner and Ingrid Yañez, who tirelessly and selflessly helped me secure adequate funding for the symposium; and Program Chairs Kelly Stewart and Michael Jensen, who did a professional and superb job ensuring the soundness of the program and the entire abstract selection process. To the five of them, my deep and personal thanks.

Funding. Generous funding by many entities made it possible for the New Orleans symposium to be a success. The organizing committee deeply thanks the donors below for their generosity. At the Platinum level (\$25,000 and above): National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, as well as an anonymous donor. At the Gold level (\$10,000 - \$24,999): Shell, Wildlife without Borders of the USFWS, NOAA, Shared Heart Foundation, Texas Sea Grant and Southeastern Louisiana University. At the Silver level (\$1,000 - \$9,999): Virginia Sea Grant, World Wildlife Fund, Virginia Institute of Marine Science, Entergy, Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, The Ocean Foundation, International Seafood Sustainability Foundation, Disney's Animal Science and the Environment, Southeastern Regional Sea Turtle Network, Loggerhead Marinelife Center, Wildlife Computers, Environmental Business Specialists, Sea Turtle Conservancy, Florida Sea Turtle License Plate, Sirtrack, Ocean Conservancy, WIDECASST, Audubon Nature Institute, Abita Brewery, LivBlue, Virginia Institute of Marine Science, Vaughan W. Brown Charitable Trust, Anonymous and the National Park Service. At the Bronze level (\$500 - \$999): CLS America, Ecological Associates Inc., Desert Star Systems, New England Biolabs, All Creatures Wildlife Solutions and Eastman Environmental. At the Inconel level (\$10 - \$499): Georgia Sea Turtle Center, PersonalLoans.com, Marinelife Alliance, Coastal Wildlife Club, Inc., Janet Hochella, Kiki Jenkins, Mission: Clean Beaches, Sandy Sly, Usagi Family, Debbie Sobel, ProFaunaBaja - ASUPMATOMA, Marydele Donnelly and Wilma Katz.