

**IUCN-SSC Marine Turtle Specialist Group  
Quarterly Update  
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**MTSG Annual General Meeting, 2007**

The 2007 Marine Turtle Specialist Group (MTSG) Annual General Meeting was held at the 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Sea Turtle Symposium in South Carolina, U.S.A., between February 24 and 28. The meeting's format was modified from the previous years to include greater opportunities for member discussions. Two half-day sessions were held; one at the beginning and one at the end of the Symposium.

The first session offered the Co-Chairs and Regional Vice Chairs a chance to make brief presentations on specific themes. Rod Mast provided an overview of the results of the BI: 3 Meeting held in August, 2006 and Brian Hutchinson presented the results of the Red List survey undertaken by Jeff Seminoff (who was unable to attend). Regional overviews were provided by Dimitris Margaritoulis and Paolo Casale for the Mediterranean (they were generous enough to halt the concurrent Mediterranean

meetings and bring the entire Mediterranean contingent in to participate in the MTSG session), Kartik Shanker for South Asia, Alberto Abreu for the Wider Caribbean (including a fascinating look at the status of hawksbills in the Yucatan), Alejandro Fallabrino for the Southwest Atlantic, Manjula Tiwari for West Africa, and Blair Witherington for the North Atlantic. Their presentations and minutes of the meeting are in preparation and soon to be posted online at [www.iucn-mtsg.org](http://www.iucn-mtsg.org). The second MTSG session was held on the closing day of the Symposium, and attended by more than 120 members and visitors. The first half of the session focussed on the Red Listing, and specifically on the re-assessment of the olive ridley. The second half of the session was a discussion on MTSG's plans to address the subject of use as it relates to marine turtles.

For the first half, an overview on the olive ridley assessment and challenges was given by Principal Assessor, Alberto Abreu, which triggered off an active discussion on several related issues. In

particular, there were deliberations over the application of A1 or A2 categories from the IUCN Red List Guidelines, and the complications posed by the fact that *arribada* nesting olive ridleys and solitary-nesting ridleys exhibit strikingly different population trends. The full minutes of this meeting have been posted on the MTSG website and can be accessed by MTSG members.

In the second half of the session, Nick Pilcher spoke on marine turtle use and led a discussion on MTSG's role and future directions as they relate to this important theme. The main issues are a lack of responsiveness from potential donors on funding a workshop to bring MTSG members together, and a call for someone within MTSG to take the lead in moving the issue forward. Since then, we are pleased to announce that several MTSG members, including Bill Irwin, Dave Owens and Pat Opay have offered to help drive the topic within the MTSG. Key tasks include coming up with a list of definitions of use (e.g. consumptive and non-consumptive), and their impacts on marine turtles. Please be on the lookout for more information on this topic.

### **Asia and Pacific Islands By-catch Consortium**

The inaugural meeting of the Asia and Pacific By-catch Consortium was held between February 15 and 16 in Honolulu, U.S.A., hosted by the Western Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Council. The Consortium was developed to foster collaboration among participants/members of the commercial fishing industry; management authorities; seafood retailer industry; experts in fishing technology, marine ecology and fisheries science; and other interested parties working to promote the efficient direction of resources to solve by-catch problems in Asia and Pacific pelagic fisheries.

The IUCN was invited to be part of this new initiative due to its global reach and organisational interest in solving by-catch-related issues, particularly with regard to endangered species. Nicolas Pilcher represented IUCN in his capacity as Co-Chair of the MTSG and also as a member of the SSC Marine Conservation Sub-Committee.

The Consortium envisions to set up a novel regional-level, voluntary, industry-lead approach to solve fishery related by-catch problems, and the sharing of information with fishery management authorities and amongst the fishing and retail industries, and providing an efficient means to support implementation of recommendations and resolutions of the International Fishers Forum series, Regional Fisheries Management Organisations and other international organisations.

The inaugural members first set out to determine the Consortium's initial objectives, namely to support and address specific pelagic long-line and purse seine by-catch issues. With regard to long-line fisheries (large-scale vessels and smaller vessels <24 m. in length), and at a visionary level, the consortium intends to (i) monitor and reduce by-catch of sea turtles and seabirds; (ii) monitor and promote management measures to ensure that shark catch levels are sustainable; and (iii) encourage practices to maximise post-release survival. For purse seine fisheries, the Consortium will monitor and reduce by-catch of juvenile target and other species. Within this framework, several short and long-term initiatives were then agreed upon by the inaugural members.

### **SPREP Marine Turtle Action Plan Review Meeting**

Nicolas Pilcher and Milani Chaloupka (Regional Vice-Chair, Pacific Region) recently provided MTSG with inputs on the development of a new, five-year plan for the conservation of marine turtles in the South Pacific, which was hosted between March 12 and 14 by the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) in Apia, Samoa. Other MTSG members in attendance included Ian Bell, representing the Queensland Parks Service, and Irene Kinan, from the Western Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Council.

As a bit of background, in 2003 SPREP members agreed to a Regional Marine Species Programme Framework 2003, which included individual plans for dugongs, whales and dolphins, and marine turtles. These plans, which were developed with the expert advice of Col Limpus and George Balazs, were intended to enable the people of the

Pacific to take a primary role in achieving the following vision: *A Pacific Ocean where populations of whales, dolphins, dugongs and marine turtles have recovered to healthy levels of abundance, have recovered their former distribution and continue to meet and sustain the cultural aspirations of Pacific peoples.*

The action plans are a collective responsibility of SPREP member states, the SPREP Secretariat, partner non-governmental and inter-governmental organisations, and private sector organisations. Network members agreed that the SPREP Secretariat would take primary responsibility for networking, information management and archiving, and annual reporting. The purpose of the recent meeting was for South Pacific countries to provide updated information from their work/country/territory regarding implementation of the agreed actions from the previous Marine Species Action Plans, and to develop a new five-year-agenda and prioritise action items for the region with regard to marine turtle conservation.

Milani gave an overview of population status by species, including major rookeries and nesting areas, while Nick made a presentation on threats to marine turtles, broken down by known and quantifiable and the unknown, unquantified threats. Both also provided inputs to the discussions, and guided deliberations pertaining to known status and biology of the species in question.

We feel it is important for MTSG to continue to play a role providing the best available scientific information and skills to regional programmes around the globe, and it was a great pleasure to be invited by the SPREP Secretariat to assist with the recent revisiting of their five-year-conservation plans. For more information, log on to [www.sprep.org](http://www.sprep.org)

### **SWOT Report II Launched at the 27<sup>th</sup> Sea Turtle Symposium**

As a founding partner in the State of the World's Sea Turtles (SWOT) Initiative, MTSG and its members have played an important role in this effort. This beautiful publication highlights global success stories that demonstrate positive actions,

which can serve as models to conserve sea turtles and their habitats and replicated by policy makers, developers, fishers, polluters and coastal communities world over.

The *SWOT Report* is coordinated by Conservation International's Sea Turtle Flagship Programme and the content is generated by a growing global network of hundreds of volunteers – the “SWOT Team” – that provides both data and an audience for a broad SWOT Initiative. *SWOT Report, Vol. II's* centrepiece is a compilation of data on loggerhead and leatherback turtles nesting on beaches world over.

Over the coming five years, this dataset will be expanded to include all the seven species of sea turtles, and will become a valuable means to visualise trends in sea turtle abundance on a planetary scale. These data can also be accessed online [www.seaturtlestatus.org](http://www.seaturtlestatus.org), where SWOT has recently developed a mapping tool using Google Maps.

Another aspect of SWOT is an Outreach Toolkit that provides user-friendly, multi-lingual documents on “How to run an education/outreach campaign...” with a variety of different audiences from fishers to religious leaders, business interests and policy makers. These documents are available for free in English and Spanish on [www.seaturtlestatus.org](http://www.seaturtlestatus.org)

### **MTSG Laments the Loss of an Old Friend**

Sea Turtles and MTSG have lost one of our greatest advocates, Ms. Frances Velay (1914-2007). An engaged philanthropist and deeply committed to the conservation of turtles, Miss Velay will be greatly missed. She was an ardent supporter of MTSG and numerous other sea turtle related causes through her Panaphil Foundation. She truly loved turtles, and converted that love into action through her heartfelt support towards our work. Co-Chair, Roderic Mast was able to speak to her by cell phone from Indonesia just minutes before her passing on January 20, and to thank her one last time for her lifelong love and commitment to turtles.