



# PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR 37<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM ON SEA TURTLE BIOLOGY AND CONSERVATION, LAS VEGAS, NEVADA, USA, 15-20 APRIL 2017

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The 37<sup>th</sup> Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation was held in Las Vegas, Nevada from April 15<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Las Vegas is renowned for its resorts, shopping, dining, nightlife and serving as a leading cultural center for Southern Nevada, but it is also a city where over 1,000,000 people are supplied with 100% renewable energy every day from solar, wind and hydroelectric sources. Thus, Las Vegas provided a good venue for the international sea turtle symposium, particularly taking into account that this year's symposium theme was *Climate Change*. Our sea turtle community hopes that soon many cities will be able to boast of the use of entirely clean energy sources.

A total of 790 people registered for the Symposium, all of who came together to learn a lot about turtles, climate change, and conservation of our ocean resources. A total of 136 oral papers and 244 posters were presented at the symposium. The symposium program also included several workshops, regional meetings and the annual marine turtle specialist group meeting.

Several fun and productive social building events were scheduled: Speed Chatting with Sea Turtle Experts, the Student Social Mixer, Video Night, the new Dance your Research Competition, and the Silent and Live Auctions. Overall the meeting was exciting and a success from every perspective; details are offered below.

**Logo:** Frank Paladino's daughter Rebecca created this year's symposium logo (Figure 1). The patterns and colors reflect the beaches and sand that are critical to turtles around the world, but which are often impacted quickly with climate change. Rebecca designed this stunning graphic that aptly represents the emergence of new life, new knowledge and the iconic welcome logo of Las Vegas inviting all to share

in making the 2017 symposium an event that can be celebrated and remembered for decades to come.

### **Pre-symposium Workshops & Regional Meetings:**

The structure of the symposium was similar to past symposia, several pre-symposium workshops and regional meetings were scheduled during the three days prior to the symposium main three days of presentations, providing the opportunity to exchange ideas regarding environmental and sea turtle conservation issues, as well as provide cutting-edge information about sea turtle health and rehabilitation. These meetings were successful, and also helped attract attendees early to the symposium.

A total of 12 workshops were held, including: the 3<sup>rd</sup> Eastern Pacific Leatherback Network (LaudOPO); State of the World's Turtles (SWOT) Team Global Summit; 8<sup>th</sup> Turtle Medicine; Strengthening Environmental Education in Conservation Projects; Application for Photo-Identification and Emerging Tracking Technologies; Light Management on Nesting Beaches: Identify, Evaluate, Plan, and Execute; Temperature-dependent Sex Determination in Marine Turtles: from Biochemistry to Ecology and Climate Change; Beyond Satellite Tracking Systems: Archival, Acoustic and Radio Telemetry - Exploring the possibilities; Use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles or Drones (UAVs) in Sea Turtle Conservation and Research; Sea Turtles and Marine Debris; Hawksbill products in Latin America and the Caribbean; and, Future Trends in Sea Turtle Epibiont Research.

A total of seven Regional Meetings were held, allowing participants from over 65 countries around the world to discuss specific problems that impact their regions. These were: Africa; East Asia; Eastern Pacific Hawksbill

Initiative (ICAPO); Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia (IOSEA); Latin America (RETOMALA); Mediterranean; and Pacific Islands/Oceania.

Also, two side meetings were held: the International Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Mini-Symposium; and the IUCN Marine Turtle Specialist Group (MTSG).

**Opening and Keynote Speakers:** After the Opening Remarks, the symposium opened with a special Native American ceremony performed by Nakotah LaRance from OhKay Owingeh Pueblo (New Mexico). He performed the spectacular, traditional Hopi Hoop dance celebrating nature and all living things. Two keynote speakers addressed attendees with speeches focused on the symposium theme; Dr. Vincent Saba, of NOAA, gave updated information about Climate Change when he presented “The Current State of Climate Change Science”, and Dr. James Spotila, of Drexel University, followed immediately making his talk a personal testimony: “Global Warming and Sea Turtles: A Personal History”.

Drs. Manjula Tiwari, Karen Bjorndal, and Jeanne Mortimer presented a special tribute “Do it like Peter” to Dr. Peter Pritchard, who has attended all 37 symposia since the first meeting was held in 1981 and who has made unparalleled, lasting contributions to the sea turtle conservation community.

**Symposium Sessions:** The Oral and Poster presentations consisted of traditional session categories, including Anatomy, Physiology and Health; In-Water Biology; Nesting Biology; Population Biology and Monitoring; Fisheries and Threats; Conservation, Management and Policy; Education, Outreach and Advocacy; and Social, Economic and Cultural Studies. A total of 136 oral papers and 244 posters were presented within these categories. Poster presenters had also the opportunity to answer questions and give more details on their presentations during “Meet the Authors”.

There were two special sessions. The session “Climate Change” consisted of oral presentations that highlighted the consequences that sea turtles currently face and will face in the future with respect to ongoing climate change. The other special session was “Citizen Science”, during which the presentations showcased how the general public can get involved with and assist sea turtle conservation.

**Social Events:** The social component of the symposium was underscored by the Welcome Social,

Student Committee activities, Video Night, Speed Chatting with Sea Turtle Experts, Silent and Live Auctions, Awards Ceremony and the Farewell Banquet.

The Student Committee conducted its 6<sup>th</sup> year of activities dedicated to welcome and encourage student attendees. This year there was three core activities: Student Presentation Feedback during which 49 evaluators volunteered to give feedback to 156 students (72 oral presentations and 84 posters). The committee hopes to continue doing this activity for the upcoming symposia as they have received many positive comments from students. The second planned activity was a half day workshop “Grant Writing: How to Get Funds”, which provided the participants a set of tools to help them write successful grant proposal. Lastly, with the aim to promote networking and communication among students and other symposium participants, and also enhance their participation in the society, a Student Social Mixer was held the afternoon before the primary symposium sessions. The mixer included the participation of the Society’s Board Members, nominees for the current Society’s election, as well as renowned sea turtle researchers.

For the Video Night, seven videos were projected to symposium attendees highlighting research, conservation and educational issues from around the world. The Video Night also shared the video entries from the new Dance your Research Competition.

The lineup for Speed Chatting with Sea Turtle Experts was: Mark Hamann (Sea Turtles and Plastic Pollution); Barbara Schroeder (Conservation Policy and Management); Selina Heppell (Sea Turtle Assessment Modeling); Andrew DiMatteo (Spatial Analysis and Cartography); David Owens (Reproductive Biology of Sea Turtles, Hall of Fame); John Wang (Sea turtle Behavior and Fisheries Bycatch); Justin Perrault (Toxicology and Sea Turtle Health); Sandra Hochscheid (Satellite Telemetry and Tagging); Maria Chadam (Sea Turtle Health and Rehabilitation); and Vincent Saba (Sea turtles and Climate Change).

As is typical, the Silent and Live Auctions were among the most popular events. The events jointly raised over \$22,000 to help students to attend future symposia via travel grants.

**ISTS Awards:** Janet Hochella and Jim Stevenson, also known as the J & J Turtle Team, received the Ed Drane Award for Volunteerism for their very long history of volunteerism with many projects throughout the United States and Costa Rica. The SWOT Network and

Cristina Ordoñez were awarded the ISTS Champions Award. ISTS Lifetime Achievement Awards were presented to Jean Beasley of Sea Turtle Rescue and Rehabilitation Center, Jack Musick of Virginia Institute of Marine Science, Marydele Donnelly of Sea Turtle Conservancy, and to Fehmida Firdous, nicknamed the “turtle lady” in Pakistan. President’s Awards were given to Nakotah LaRance, Brad Nahill and Alike Panagopoulou for their great service. The Grassroots Conservation Award was given to Paso Pacifico for their ranger community program.

**Archie Carr Student Awards:** There were 40 student oral presentations and 73 student poster presentations nominated for the Archie Carr Student Awards. Eight students won the Archie Carr award for outstanding presentations. Miriam Mueller (Biology-winner), Bethany Holtz (Biology-runner up), Brianna Elliott (Conservation-winner) and Emily Asp (Conservation-runner up) won in the Poster Category. Robert Johnson (Biology-winner), Matthew Ramirez (Biology-runner up), Andrews Agyekumhene (Conservation-winner) and Bianca Santos (Conservation-runner up) won in the Oral Category.

**Travel Grants:** The ISTS was able to support a total of 120 travel grant applicants with lodging during the symposium. The distribution of bed grant accommodations per region was as follows: 14 bed grants to Africa representatives, 8 to Asia Pacific, 4 to Caribbean, 10 to Europe, 20 to Mexico/Central America, 16 to South America, 12 to South Asia, and 36 to US/Canada. This level of travel grant awards represented about 15.2% of the total registered participants.

**Board of Directors Meeting:** The Society’s Board of Directors got together and discussed reports from the Nominations Committee, Student Committee, Travel Committee, Students Awards Committee, ISTS Awards Committee, as well as reports from the Program Officer and Treasurer.

**Plenary Business Meeting and Society Elections:** On the last day of the symposium, a Board of Director member presented a proposal for a “Code of Conduct” to be followed by all society’s member. Also, the Travel Grant Committee Chair and the Treasurer presented their reports to society members. The attendees approved both reports.

As a result of the 2017 society’s annual election, Ken Lohmann from North Carolina (USA) was elected President for symposium 2019, George Balazs as the new ISTS Treasurer, and Manjula Tiwari was

re-elected ISTS Secretary. Also, the elections added two new members to the Board of Directors, Felix Moncada (2022) and Marc Girondot (2022). They join Yakup Kaska (2018), Emma Harrison (2018), Pamela Plotkin (2018), Mariana Fuentes (2019), Alan Rees (2019), Andrea Phillott (2020), Laura Prosdocimi (2020), Andrews Agyekumhene (2021) and Jeanette Wyneken (2021) (year indicates board member’s end of term). Jesus Tomas and Natalie Wilderman were elected to join the Nominations Committee, and Joana Hancock joined the Awards Committee.

Yoshimasa Matsuzawa, ISTS President 2018, provided details regarding the upcoming symposium to be held in Kobe, Japan. Dates have been designated as 18<sup>th</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> February 2018, during which time society members will once again convene, in this case celebrating the theme “Beyond Protection of Sea Turtles”.

**Exhibitors and Vendors:** There were a variety of exhibitors and vendors that participated in the Las Vegas symposium. They included: Ayotzintli AC; Bioko Biodiversity Protection Program; Bioko Marine Turtle Program; CLS America, Inc.; Desert Star Systems LLC; East Coast Observers, Inc.; Ecology Project International; FlyWire Cameras, Inc.; Elcas Lightning; Herding Turtles (Coins, Currency, and Exonomia); Karumbe; Latin American Sea Turtles (LAST); Loggerhead Marinelifelife Center; Lotek Wireless Inc./Sirtrack Ltd.; Marinelifelife Alliance; Paso Pacifico; Pro Delphinus; Sea Turtle Conservancy; Southeast Regional Sea Turtle Network; Telonics, Inc.; The Leatherback Trust; The State of the World’s Sea Turtles (SWOT); and Wildlife Computers.

**Fundraising:** Generous funding by many entities made possible the success of the ISTS37. The entire society deeply thanks the following donors for their generosity: At the Gold level (\$10,000-\$24,999): The Shared Earth Foundation and The Leatherback Trust. At the Silver level (\$1,000-\$9,999): Disney’s Animals, Science & Environment, Sea Turtle Conservancy, International Seafood Sustainability Foundation, Sirtrack & Lotek, George Balazs and Frank Paladino. At the Bronze level (\$500-\$999): J. Ross Publishing, Team Sympraxis, CLS America, National Save the Sea Turtle Foundation, Bioko Marine Turtle Program, Cefas Technology Limited and Nevada State College.

**Acknowledgments:** Organizing the Las Vegas symposium took a large number of volunteers allocated in various committees: registrars, fundraising, program, poster, workshop, student, travel grant, awards, exhibitor, volunteer, auction, and proceedings

committees. All of these individuals gave significant number of hours, effort and dedication towards their entrusted tasks. By alphabetical order of their first name, the Society thanks Adriana Cortés, Alan Rees, Alberto Abreu Grobois, Alejandro Fallabrino, Alexander Gaos, Aliko Panagopoulou, Amanda Southwood Williard, Amber Rhodes, Ana Barragan, Andrea Phillott, Andrew DiMatteo, Andrews Aguekumhene, Andy Estrades, Angela Formia, Barbara Schroeder, Blair Witherington, Boniventure Mchomvu, Brad Nahill, Brian Hutchinson, Brian Shamblin, Bryan Wallace, Catherine Bell, Chelsea Clyde-Brockway, Connie Ka-Yan Ng, Daniela Freggi, Dave Owens, David Pike, David Rostal, Donna Broadbent, Dustin Baumbach, Elena Finkbeiner, Emma Harrison, Erin Seney, Gabi Blanco, Gabriela Velez-Rubio, George Balazs, George Shillinger, Hal Avery, Hector Barrios-Garrido, Ingrid Yañez, Irene Kelly, Isao Kawazu, Itzel Sifuentes, Jacques Laloë, Jeanette Wyneken, Jeff Seminoff, Jeffrey Mangel, Jennell Black, Jennifer Homcy, Jesus Tomas, Joanna Alfaro-Shigueto, Joe Pfaller, John Wang, Jordan Thomson, Justin Perrault,

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