



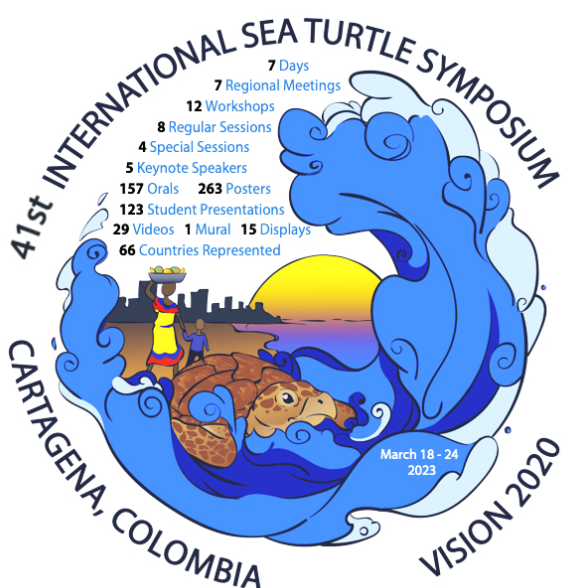
PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR 41ST ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM ON SEA TURTLE BIOLOGY AND CONSERVATION, CARTAGENA, BOLIVAR, COLOMBIA, 18-24TH MARCH 2023

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The 41st Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation was held in Cartagena, Colombia from March 18th to 24th, 2023. Cartagena is a city that is located on the shores of the Caribbean Sea, in the northwestern part of the South American continent. The city has several archipelagos and islands around that are paradises for true rest. Among these are Tierra Bomba Island, Múcura Island, and Barú Island, among others. Cartagena de Indias brings together the charm of colonial architecture, the excitement of a vivid nightlife, fascinating cultural festivals, and lush landscapes. This fabulous destination holds the secrets of history within its walled city, on its balconies, and in the narrow stone walkways that inspired author Gabriel García Márquez, who received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1982. Framed by its stunning bay, Cartagena de Indias is one of the most beautiful, well-preserved cities in the Americas; a treasure that is currently one of the most heavily frequented tourist destinations in Colombia. Thus, Cartagena provided a great venue for the International

Sea Turtle Symposium, particularly taking into account that this year's symposium theme was "Vision 20/20: Bridging communities and technology for marine turtle conservation". The theme focuses on a new scope of what should be community-based conservation worldwide, as well as applying technologies and field techniques for new researchers to deal with future challenges in the conservation biology of sea turtles.

A total of 583 people attended the symposium, all of which came together to learn more about turtles, community engagement, and conservation of our ocean resources. A total of 157 oral papers and 263 posters were presented at the symposium. The program also included several workshops, regional meetings and the annual Marine Turtle Specialist Group meeting. Several fun and productive social building events were scheduled as well.

Overall, the meeting was exciting and a success from every perspective. After three years of non in-person symposia due to the covid-19 pandemic, undoubtedly the 41st International Sea Turtle Symposium was an unforgettable gathering. This event will be remembered for decades as one of the best symposia in the history of the International Sea Turtle Symposium. Details are offered below.

While the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic has certainly passed, as a Society (International Sea Turtle Society, ISTS) we aimed at doing our part to keep everyone safe and healthy and be socially responsible. Recommendations were shared and precautions were implemented during the entirety of the symposium.

Logo

The logo was designed by Sarah Shaver, an amateur artist from the UCF's Marine Turtle Research Group. The logo incorporated the focus of hawksbill sea turtle conservation with the iconic fruit sellers, "Palenqueras";

a symbol of the woman of Cartagena. Dressed in colorful costumes and wearing a great smile, the “*Palenqueras*” embellish the Historical Center of Cartagena de Indias, becoming part of the landscape. The reason for their name is due to their origins, because these women, who sell delicious tropical fruits and sweets, are native to the first slave-free town in America, called San Basilio de Palenque, a district of Mahates, Bolivar. The logo perfectly combines conservation with culture: the *Palenquera* showing a child the turtle symbolizes the importance of passing the passion for sea turtle conservation on to the next generation.

Pre-Symposium Workshops and Regional Meetings

The structure of the symposium was similar to past symposia, with several pre-symposium workshops and regional meetings scheduled during the three days prior to the symposium’s main four days of presentations, providing the opportunity to exchange ideas regarding environmental and sea turtle conservation issues, as well as cutting-edge research and techniques.

A total of 12 workshops were held, including: A Strategy framework on the Development of Solutions to Address the Key Threat of Sea Turtle Trafficking and Direct Take in the Caribbean, Central and South America; 4th Drones and Turtles; 12th Medicine and Rehabilitation of Sea Turtles; Reducing Bycatch by Building Capacity for Collaborative Research among Fishers and Conservationists; Designing Behavior Change Campaigns for Sea Turtle Conservation; The Climate-threats Matrix: Understanding and Quantifying the Interactions of Cumulative Stressors with Climate Change and the resulting Impacts on Sea Turtles; Applications of Sea Turtle Reference Genomes for Research and Conservation Management; Student Committee Workshop: Career Paths and Key Approaches to Prepare and Succeed in the Sea Turtle World; Male Sea Turtles: Current Global Conservation and Research Efforts; 4th Plastic Pollution and Sea Turtles; Future Technologies for Large-scale Monitoring of Marine Turtle Nesting Populations; Strengthening Community-based Environmental Education through efficient use of Technological Communication Tools.

The 41st symposium brought together participants from over 66 countries around the world, allowing them to discuss specific problems that impact their regions. A total of five successful Regional Meetings were held and these had the extra benefit of helping attract attendees early to the symposium venue. These regional meetings included: Africa, Indian Ocean and South East Asia (IOSEA); Latin America (RETOMALA); Mediterranean; and Oceania and Pacific Islands. Two special meetings were

also developed during the symposium week: the Annual General Meeting of the Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network (WIDECAST) and the 5th Eastern Pacific Leatherback Network Meeting (LaudOPO).

Also, two side meetings were held: the Colombian Ministry of Environment Sea Turtle Planning meeting, and the IUCN Marine Turtle Specialist Group (MTSG).

Opening and Keynote Speakers

ISTS President Diego Amorocho provided the symposium’s Opening Remarks, reflecting on the uncertainty and despair that settled in the hearts of many during the pandemic era, which also led to the loss of many loved ones, jobs and conservation efforts. The pandemic also led to canceling the Cartagena Symposium 2020 one week before the opening day. Nonetheless, as stated by Diego, “But hope got us through that and brought us back together, as an example of resilience we are gathered here, and this is a reason to celebrate life, celebrate this very unusual and unique Society, to which we all belong”. He continued highlighting the importance of the interdependence between technology and communities to achieve sea turtle conservation, with technology significantly increasing our understanding of sea turtles and, making our vision 20/20, much sharper, broader, and precise; and the importance of communities, without whose involvement from project conception to implementation in the field, nothing could be accomplished. Communities are empowered and are increasingly aware of the importance of protecting sea turtles and their habitats. Technology has come to these communities to stay, to close knowledge gaps, and to help confront new challenges.

Diego included an *In Memoriam* tribute to sea turtle friends and colleagues that have passed away during the past three years. He thanked the sponsors and his outstanding organizing team. The symposium was subsequently officially opened by Ximena Rojas Giraldo, Director of the Direction of Marine, Coastal and Aquatic Resources Affairs (DAMCRA) from the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development of Colombia. Two keynote speakers addressed attendees with speeches focused on the symposium theme: Hector Barrios from TropWATER and Grupo de Trabajo en Tortugas Marinas del Golfo de Venezuela, talked about the evolution of sea turtle community-based conservation in Latin America and the Caribbean; and Brad Nahill, from SEE Turtles provided valuable personal experience to the audience about fundraising for sea turtle conservation by presenting innovative ideas, advice, and opportunities.

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 157 oral papers and 263 posters were presented within these categories. Poster presenters also had the opportunity to answer questions and give more details on their presentations during “Meet the Authors” sessions scheduled during the afternoons of all four primary days of the symposium.

There were, four one-hour special oral sessions that included discussion panels on Wildlife Crime: Illegal Trade in Marine Turtles (moderated by Christine Hof, WWF Australia); How Can Technology Improve Current Conservation Efforts? (moderated by Jeffrey Seminoff, NOAA Fisheries, USA); The Ultimate Goal of Hatcheries: Finding a Balance between Business and Conservation (moderated by Nicholas Pilcher, National Center for Wildlife, Saudi Arabia, and Marine Research Foundation, Malaysia); The Ultimate Community-Based Conservation of Marine Turtles: The Next Generation (moderated by Adriana Cortés, SEE Turtles, USA).

Social Events

The social component of the symposium was underscored by several events, including Cultural Night, Welcome Social at the Hilton gardens, Student Committee activities, Video Night, Turtle Trading Post, Silent and Live Auctions, Awards Ceremony, the Farewell Banquet, and the painting of an outstanding Mural, which included an associated Hand printing event and Unveiling Ceremony.

The **Cultural Night** welcomed all symposium attendees with a colorful and vibrant performance by the school children from Colegio Ambientalista de Cartagena. They donned vibrant clothing made out of recycled materials that showcased marine resources on a light blue mantle. They started dancing the popular cumbia “*La Tortuga Bajo el Agua*” (The Turtle Under the Sea) and the contagious Caribbean and African rhythms invited everyone to the dance floor (Photo 2).

The **Student Committee** conducted its 11th year of activities dedicated to welcoming and encouraging student attendees. The committee led three core activities, the first being the Student Presentation Feedback, during which 71 evaluators volunteered to give feedback on 122 student presentations (52 oral papers and 70 posters), including

identification of strengths and areas for improvement.

The second activity was a half-day workshop titled “Career paths and key approaches to prepare and succeed in the sea turtle world”, during which eight guest speakers provided 52 student participants with career advice related to obtaining jobs and working in government, consultancy, academia, and non-profits. Lastly, the Committee hosted their “Speed Chatting with Experts” event for the 10th time, where for a small donation, symposium attendees had the opportunity to have one-on-one chats with top research and conservation experts. Eleven experts shared their knowledge and experience in 10-minute slots. Experts included: Alan Zavala, Alejandro Fallabrino, Alexander Gaos, Bryan Wallace, Camryn Allen, Daniel Gonzalez, Felix Moncada, Frank Paladino, Kate Mansfield, Manjula Tiwari, and Miguel Reyes.

The **Video Night** projected during three hours 29 videos from 19 countries, highlighting their sea turtle research, conservation, and educational programs.

The **Turtle Trading Post**, in its 2nd year, was a total success in providing a platform for sharing gently used or never used equipment, field gear and laboratory items. Our global sea turtle family donated 90 items valued at more than US\$6,800. Through a raffle the items found a second life to support new science and more conservation.

As is typical, the **Silent and Live Auctions** were among the most popular events. More than 400 items were auctioned, and both auctions jointly raised approximately US\$24,000 (Photo 3). All raised funds go towards the Travel Grants Program to help students and participants from underrepresented countries to attend future symposia.

Art Mural

As part of the legacy that the symposium wanted to leave in the city of Cartagena, a large mural was painted during the symposium by Colombian artist Akilles. The mural displayed a beautiful hawksbill sea turtle in the ocean, with local people looking after it. The artwork helped highlight the importance of sea turtles for ecosystems and the vital role communities play in their conservation. This beautiful mural was located on the Mezzanine on the 2nd floor of the hotel, across from the symposium’s primary registration and event halls, and was funded by The Turtleman Foundation, Artesanías Tortugas Sin Fronteras, and Hilton Cartagena.

Akilles painted the mural during the symposium, thus attendees and the public were able to observe

his painting process from start to finish. The artist reserved a space on the mural so that the symposium participants -by purchasing a ticket- could use paint to print their hands on the mural. The collection of handprints depicted a coral reef, representing the primary habitat on which hawksbill turtles rely (Photo 5). All funds raised in the handprint activity went to the Travel Grant Program as well.

Awards

Two rounds of ISTS Awards took place during the 41st symposium.

2020 ISTS Awards: Barbara Schroeder, Karen Eckert and Larry Crowder received the ISTS Lifetime Achievement Award for their enormous contributions to the study and conservation of marine turtles. Karumbé: Tortugas Marinas del Uruguay, Marine Turtle Newsletter (MTN), Kimberly Stewart, and Pedro Vernet all received the ISTS Champions Award.

2023 ISTS Awards: Jacques Fretey, Kenneth J. Lohmann, and Fernando Manzano “Papá Tortuga” (R.I.P.) received the ISTS Lifetime Achievement Award for their devotion to sea turtle research and conservation. The ISTS Champions Award was awarded to Verdiazul, a sea turtle conservation group from Costa Rica. The ISTS Ed Drane Award for Volunteerism was received by Carl W. Stearns for his very long history of volunteerism with many projects throughout the United States. Three President’s Awards were presented to: Asociación Caguama, a sea turtle community-based conservation organization based in El Valle, Chocó in the Colombian Pacific coast; Hector Barrios for his contribution to sea turtle research and conservation in Venezuela; and Richard Reina for his outstanding contributions to the Society and devotion to educate new generations of sea turtle scientists worldwide.

Grassroots Conservation Award: Sixteen presentations met the award criteria and were reviewed by the four judges of the committee, and the Wayuu Indigenous Communities of Venezuela won the award for their important role in sea turtle conservation, which they demonstrated in their presentation “The Wayuu Voices: A changing connection with the marine turtles”.

Archie Carr Student Awards: A panel of 16 judges evaluated 54 student oral presentations and 68 student poster presentations nominated for the Archie Carr Student Awards. The eight students awarded for their outstanding presentations were: Katrina Phillips, Makayla Kelso, Samantha Kuschke, and

Taylor Brunson in the Biology category, and Kayla Marie Burgher, Keilor Cordero, Ademir da Silva, and Katie Ayres in the Conservation category.

Travel Grants

The 41st symposium was able to support a total of 74 symposium participants with lodging during the symposium. The distribution of grants per region was as follows: two grants to Africa representatives, five to Asia, six to Europe, 26 to Mexico and Central America, two to Middle East, three to Oceania, 17 to South America, and 13 to USA and Canada. This level of travel grant awards represented 12.7% of the total registered participants.

ISTS Board of Directors Meeting

The Society’s Board of Directors got together and discussed reports from the ISTS President, Nominations Committee, Awards Committee, Student Committee, Travel Grants Committee, Archie Carr Student Awards Committee, Grassroots Conservation Award Committee, as well as reports from the Webmaster, Fundraising Officer, and Treasurer.

Closing Remarks

Keynote speaker included Rod Mast from Oceanic Society (USA), who addressed the progress in documenting the global geography of sea turtles in the last 20 years, and Luis Naranjo from WWF Colombia who spoke about the importance of public and private alliances for sea turtle conservation. ISTS President Diego Amorochó’s Closing Remarks provided a summary on the numbers (attendance, funds raised, etc.) achieved during the symposium, and emphasized that sea turtle conservation is only possible with community participation. Diego used the opportunity to once again pay tribute to sea turtle friends and colleagues that have passed away during the past three years, and thanked his outstanding organizing team.

Plenary Business Meeting

On the last day of the symposium, a board member presented the results of a survey conducted for Society members, which allowed them to indicate their preferred format for symposium and associated events (workshops, regional meetings). Next steps on this matter will examine preferences of different demographics, financial projections with any change of format, among others. Other board member presented on the concept behind the Small Grant Program and how it has supported six sea turtle projects.

The Travel Grants Committee Chair and the Treasurer presented their reports to Society members. The attendees approved both reports. The Nominations Committee Chair presented the 2023 elections results: Andrews Agyekumhene from Ghana is the elected President for 2025. Also, the elections added two new members to the Board of Directors, Joseph Pfaller and Itzel Sifuentes, who will start their terms in 2023.

The 2024 ISTS President Stephen Dunbar from Protective Turtle Ecology Center for Training Outreach and Research (ProTECTOR, Honduras) and Loma Linda University (USA) provided details regarding the upcoming symposium to be held in Pattaya, Thailand. He reported that dates have been set as 24th-29th March 2024, during which time Society members will once again convene, in this case celebrating the theme “All In - All Together: Inspiring the Next Generations of Sea Turtle Conservationists” (Photo 4).

Exhibitors and Vendors

There were a variety of exhibitors and vendors that participated in the symposium, including: ASUPMATOMA A.C., Ayotzintii A.C., Asociación Centro de Rescate de Especies Marinas Amenazadas (CREMA), Asociación Latin American Sea Turtles (LAST), Associação de Proteção e Conservação Ambiental Cabo de São Roque, CLS America, Fabien Cousteau Ocean Learning Center, Fundación Coriácea, La Tortuga Laúd, Lotek, Nest Domes, SEE Turtles, The State of the World’s Sea Turtles (SWOT), The Turtleman Foundation, Universidad del Sinú, Wildlife Computers, and WWF Australia.

Fundraising

Generous funding by many entities made the success of the 41st symposium possible. The Society deeply thanks the following donors for their generous and valuable financial support: At the Gold level (\$10,000-\$24,999): WWF Australia & ShellBank, and National Save The Sea Turtle Foundation. At the Silver level (\$5,000-\$9,999): Sea Turtle Conservancy. At the Bronze level (\$1,000-\$4,999): Disney Conservation, Wildlife Computers, International Seafood Sustainability Foundation, Coastal Wildlife Club, Inc., and Lotek. At the Aluminum level (\$500-\$999): AZA Sea Turtle SAFE Program, Upwell Turtles, Centro de Investigación para el Manejo Ambiental y el Desarrollo (CIMAD), and The Leatherback Trust. At the Inconel level (\$25-\$499): Yonat Swimmer, Ecological Associates, Inc., Sea Turtle Week, and Pendoley Environmental.

Communications

The large communication effort was undertaken to promote the 41st symposium and that effort was recognized, thanked, and congratulated by the Society’s membership. Communication efforts focused on four areas: continuously updating the Society and Symposium webpages; sending e-mail messages to the Society’s membership regarding important information, dates, events, etc.; dissemination of information on social media; and photographic and video documentation during the symposium. For the latter, an appointed photographer (Marcos Cossio) captured moments during all of the symposium’s activities. Short interviews were conducted and included in recap videos that were created for each day and subsequently shared the following morning. A final video containing footage from the entire week was shared during the Closing Remarks.

Taking into account the large audience from Latin America due to the fact that the symposium was being held in Colombia, all communications were made in both English and Spanish.

Acknowledgments

Organising the 2023 Cartagena Symposium took a large number of individuals allocated in various committees: registrars, fundraising, website, travel grants, program, posters, special sessions, workshops & regional meetings, videos, vendors & exhibitors, students, auctions, turtle trading post, awards, and proceedings committees. All of them gave significant number of hours, effort and dedication –many months in advance- towards their entrusted tasks to make the 41st symposium an unforgettable gathering.

By alphabetical order of their first name, the Society thanks Adolfo Marco, Adriana Cortés, Alan Rees, Alberto Abreu, Alejandra Sandoval, Alejandro Fallabirno, Alexander Gaos, Aliko Panagopoulou, Amalia Maria Cano, Amanda Southwood, Aminta Jauregui, Ana Barragán, Ana Liria, Ana Moncada, Andrea Phillott, Andres Estrades, Andrews Agyekumhene, Angela Formia, Ani Henriquez, Anjelika Solé Abdo Abou Issa, Ann Marie Lauritsen, Anna Ortega, Antonio Trujillo, Ashleigh Bandimere, Bia Dias, Blair Bentley, Brad Nahill, Brendan Godley, Brian Hutchinson, Bryan Wallace, Camila Mazzoni, Carmen Mejías, Catherine Hart, Christine Hof, Chris Long, Cindy Vargas, Daniel González, Daniela Freggi, Daniela Rojas, Daphne Wrobel, Dawn Witherington, Diana del Pilar Ramírez, Diego Amorcho, Emily Duncan, Erin Seney, Fanny Suarez, Frank Paladino, Gabriela Arango, Gabriela Vélez, Georgina Zamora, Hector Barrios, Imed Jribi,

Ingrid Yañez, Irene Kelly, Jack Frazier, Jacques Fretey, Janie Reavis, Jeanette Wyneken, Jeffrey Mangel, Jeffrey Seminoff, Jesse Senko, Jesús Tomás, Jimena Gutiérrez, Joseph Pfaller, José Matarezi, José Urteaga, Juan Manuel Rodríguez, Juan Sebastian Ayala, Kara Dodge, Karen Eckert, Karla Barrientos, Kate Mansfield, Katharine Hart, Kellie Pendoley, Kelly Stewart, Kirsty Scott, Lalith Ekanayake, Laura Prosdocimi, Liliana Poggio, Lisa Komoroske, Luis German Naranjo, Lyndsey Tanabe, Manjula Tiwari, Marco Garcia, Marcos Cossio, Mariana Fuentes, Mariela Pajuelo, Marina Zucchini, Mariluz Parga, Mark Hamann, Matt Ware, Matthew Godfrey, Matthew Lettrich, Matthew Ramirez, Michael Salmon, Michel Nalovic, Mustapha Aksissou, Natalia Teryda, Natalie Wildermann, Nathan Robinson, Neca Marcovaldi, Nicholas Blume, Nicholas Pilcher, Paul Whittock, Pilar Santidrián, Rachel Smith, Raul Garcia, Ray Carthy, Rebecca Mott, Renato Bruno, Richard Reina, Rita Patricio, Rocio Alvarez, Roderic Mast, Roldan Valverde, Ryan Welsh, Shaleyla Kelez, Sam Weber, Sandra Hochscheid, Seh Ling Long, Shaya Honarvar, Stephen Dunbar, Summer Martin, Terry Meyer, Trevor Proctor, Ximena Rojas, Ximena Velez, Yakup Kaska, Yonat Swimmer, Zahirul Islam, and Zoe Meletis.

The Society also thanks the 122 volunteers that were assigned on-site in different tasks: Aarston Dickson, Abigail Flowers, Alex Fireman, Alma Vázquez, Aloysse Abreu,

Amelly Ramos, Anahí Guadalupe, Andrea Hernández, Anna Ortega, Anuar Romero, Arona Bender, Astrid Luna, Bárbara Selles, Brenda Espinoza, Brittany Chang, Brittany Clemans, Camila Miguel, Camille Clarke, Camille Kynoch, Carlos Calagua, Carlos Pacheco, Chiara Agabiti, Claudia Rodríguez, Costanza Manes, Daiane Santana, Daniela Cabellero, Diana del Pilar Ramirez, Eamy Ayala, Elizabeth Gutiérrez, Emily Christiansen, Eneida Fajardo, Felipe Baker, Felix Moncada, Gabrielle Gagliotti, Gilberto Borges, Giovanna Martins, Gisela Marin, Gloria Guerrero, Guilia Baldi, Gustavo Ortíz, Ho Kooi Chee, Irama Perozo, Jack Wiggins, Jaime Restrepo, Jeffry Madrigal, Julia Azanza, Juliana Masis, Julie Barrios, Keilor Cordero, Keithlyin Rankin, Kendra Cope, Lara Heguaburu, Liberty Boyd, Luis Angel Tello, Luna Vieira, Mariana Inglés, Maria Dabrowski, Mariantú Robles, Marvin Pineda, Melissa Martinez, Melissa Valle, Netfaly Sánchez, Paris Organist, Perla Fernández, Priscilla Santos, Quintin Bergman, Raidel Borroto, Randy Calderón, Rebecca Diggins, Samantha Trail, Sarah Sexton, Sarah Shaver, Seh-Ling Long, Sofia Chavarria, Sofia Jones, Sophia Coveney, Teal Guetschow, Veronica Valverde, and the students from Universidad del Sinú.

Last but not least, the Society thanks Carlos Salas and Carlos Delgado for providing beautiful photos for the banners that embellished the conference rooms; and Alejandra Marines for providing an image for the COVID-19 precautions signage.

