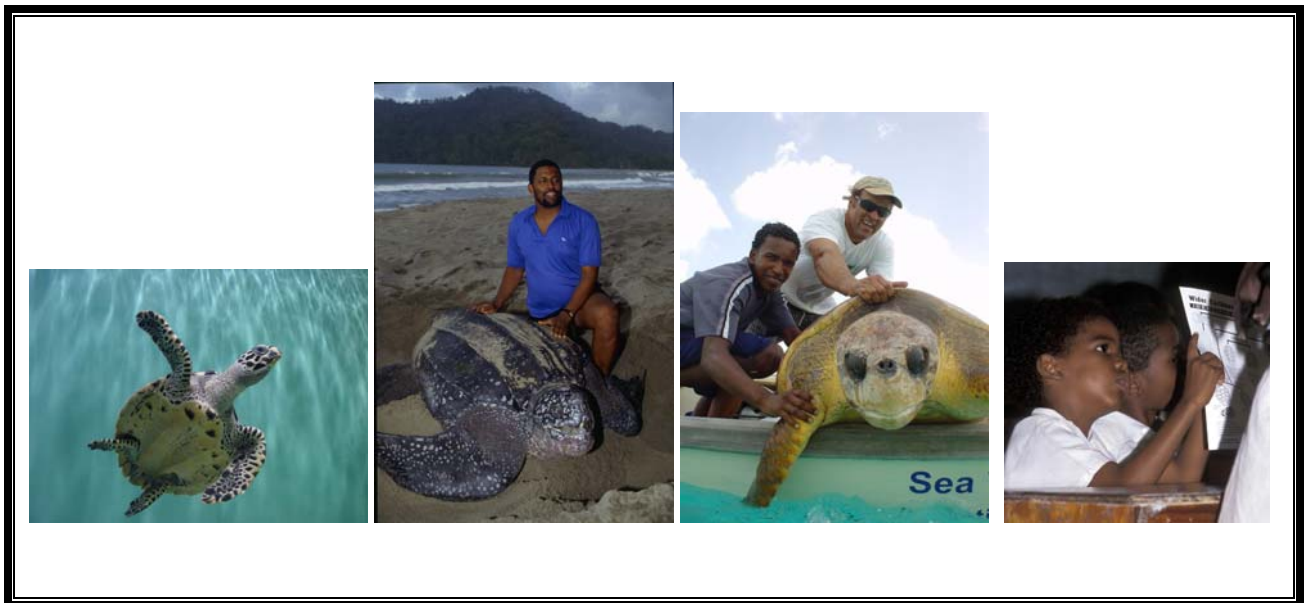




WIDECAST

Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network



WIDECAST & SPAW

BRIDGING SCIENCE AND POLICY FOR THE BENEFIT OF CARIBBEAN COMMUNITIES

Prepared for the 3rd Meeting of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) of the Contracting Parties to the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) in the Wider Caribbean Region

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ORIGIN

WIDECAST has been an integral partner of the Caribbean Environment Programme (CEP) since its inception. Concern over the status of shared sea turtle stocks and their habitats was the basis for APCEP project 6/1, which was ranked among the first cohort of 'projects of common interest' to be implemented by the CEP and was one of the first to be funded. WIDECAST's success in local project development, national recovery planning, and regional information-sharing has long been a model for other taxa-specific initiatives in the region (Appendix I) and has resulted in a strong regional capacity for science-based sea turtle management.

The concept of a "Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Recovery Team and Conservation Network" was conceived by Milton Kaufmann of Monitor International, and formalized at an international meeting in the Dominican Republic in 1981. "WIDECAST", as the network later became known, was invited to serve the CEP as a regional Partner Organization in 1983. For 15 years WIDECAST operated as an unincorporated, volunteer coalition of Caribbean professionals bound by a shared commitment to purpose and a passion for making science accessible to communities, policy-makers, and the inter-governmental forum.

In 1996, seeking greater institutional stability and desiring to enhance its capacity to raise funds, network members made the decision to incorporate in the USA. Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation were accepted by the Internal Revenue Service on 24 February 1997. In 2003, seeking greater institutional support and an academic setting, the Executive Director accepted an offer by Duke University to relocate the WIDECAST office to the university's Nicholas School Marine Laboratory in Beaufort, North Carolina.

A full-time Executive Director and two part-time professionals serve a regional network of national coordinators resident in more than 40 nations and territories. The WIDECAST Country Coordinators (see Appendix II) have met annually since 1984 to review ongoing programs and to establish collective priorities for the coming year, maintaining a leadership role in the research and conservation of Caribbean sea turtles.



Figure 1. The Wider Caribbean Region is defined as the marine environment of the Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean Sea and the areas of the Atlantic Ocean adjacent thereto, south of 30° north latitude and within 200 nautical miles of the Atlantic coasts of the States occurring between the USA and French Guiana (inclusive), including Latin America and the insular States of the Eastern Caribbean. In addition, the WIDECAS network embraces Bermuda to the north and Brazil to the south because both nations share Caribbean sea turtle resources.

SYNOPSIS

With affiliated programs in dozens of Caribbean nations and territories, WIDECAS is a proactive and inclusive mechanism for developing and disseminating science-based tools that empower communities to conserve and manage biodiversity resources, and that promote sustainable development on national and regional scales.

By bringing the best available science to bear on decision-making (at all levels), emphasizing information exchange and training, and encouraging harmonized practices, the network successfully promotes enduring linkages between science, policy, and public participation in the design and implementation of sea turtle management programs. In so doing, the network seeks to increase the effectiveness of protection, management and use initiatives and secure a future where sea turtles can meaningfully fulfill their economic, ecological, and spiritual/cultural roles.



VISION

The collective vision of the Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network (WIDECAST) is to realize a future where all inhabitants of the Wider Caribbean Region, human and sea turtle alike, can live together in balance.

RATIONALE

Sea turtles, once abundant in the Caribbean Sea and serving as keystone species in tropical marine ecosystems, are severely reduced from historical levels, both in population size and range. According to the IUCN *Red List of Threatened Species*, persistent over-exploitation, especially of gravid females, and widespread collection of eggs are primarily responsible for observed declines at regional and global scales.

In addition to a largely unmanaged harvest that has spanned centuries, sea turtles are accidentally captured in active or abandoned fishing gear, resulting in death to tens and perhaps hundreds of thousands of turtles annually. Moreover, coral reef and seagrass degradation, oil spills, chemical waste, persistent plastic and other marine debris, high density coastal development, and an increase in ocean-based tourism have damaged or eliminated nesting beaches and feeding areas.

Reversing population declines is complicated. Threats to sea turtle populations can accumulate over long periods of time, and can occur anywhere in the population's range. Because sea turtles are highly migratory by habit, what appears as a decline in a local population may be a direct consequence of the activities of peoples many hundreds or thousands of kilometers away. Thus while local conservation is crucial, cooperative action is also called for at international levels.



CORE BELIEFS

WIDECASST is rooted in the belief that conservation must be nurtured from within, it cannot be commanded from outside.

By involving stakeholders at all levels and encouraging policy-oriented research, WIDECASST puts science to practical use in conserving biodiversity and advocates for grassroots involvement in decision-making and project implementation.

It is widely recognized that sea turtles will not survive in the Caribbean Sea without unflinching regional cooperation and coordination of conservation and management programs. WIDECASST – one of the oldest and most active biodiversity networks in the world, and working in partnership with the UNEP Caribbean Environment Programme – provides the mechanism for such collaboration.

With Country Coordinators and partner organizations throughout the Western Central Atlantic, the network is instrumental in developing and promoting best practices, creating conservation models, training and institution strengthening, harmonizing legislation, encouraging community involvement, and raising public awareness ... and in sharing this approach with other regions of the world, to broader benefit.

“We see WIDECASST as a model initiative. By defining conservation priorities based on sound science, promoting consensus and emphasizing public awareness, the network has successfully integrated once isolated efforts into a collaborative regional response to the shared challenge of depleted sea turtle populations in our region.”

~ Alessandra Vanzella-Khoury, UN Environment Programme, Kingston, Jamaica



GOALS

In support of the SPAW Protocol – “Recognizing that the ... protection of threatened and endangered species will enhance the cultural heritage and values of the countries and territories in the Wider Caribbean Region and bring increased economic and ecological benefits to them” [*Preamble*] – WIDECAS^T is structured to define and address national and international conservation priorities for sea turtles and for the habitats upon which they depend. To that end, members of the WIDECAS^T network seek to:

- Bring the best available science to bear on sea turtle management, conservation, and governance;
- Empower stakeholders to make effective use of science in the policy process;
- Train Caribbean scientists, managers and policy-makers in the science of sea turtle management through academic and field courses, thematic workshops, and mentoring and exchange programs;
- Provide an ongoing mechanism for collaboration within/ among range states;
- Develop integrated natural resource management models and replicate successful initiatives, especially involving partnerships with communities;
- Secure funding to develop and enhance management capacity within government and non-governmental sectors;
- Improve the long-term financial, institutional, and social sustainability of marine biodiversity protection in the Wider Caribbean Region; and
- Promote the creation of political and institutional mechanisms to ensure the "mainstreaming" of environmental concerns into other sectors, including planning, education, and media.



OBJECTIVES

WIDECAS^T's short-term objectives are to provide Wider Caribbean governments with updated information on the status of sea turtles in the region, to provide specific recommendations for the management and recovery of endangered, threatened, and vulnerable sea turtle stocks, and to assist governments in the discharge of their obligations under national law and international agreements, including the Cartagena Convention and its SPAW Protocol.

For example, in support of Article 10 of the SPAW Protocol – “Each Party shall ... carry out species recovery, management, planning and other measures to effect the survival of [endangered and threatened species]” – WIDECAS^T experts collaborate with local stakeholders to develop comprehensive national conservation blueprints known as “Sea Turtle Recovery Action Plans”.

WIDECAS^T's longer-term objectives are to promote a regional capability to implement scientifically sound sea turtle management and conservation programs, enabling a collective regional response to a common problem – the progressive disappearance of sea turtles in the Western Central Atlantic basin.

To this end, WIDECAS^T is committed to:

- Providing mutual technical assistance designed to strengthen the capacity of existing institutions, programs and expertise (at national and regional levels) to determine and evaluate sea turtle conservation priorities, and to participate in science-based management planning and project implementation;
- Strengthening the regulatory framework by assisting governments in the formulation of legislation, policies, and standards, as appropriate, for the management of sea turtles at local, national and regional levels;



- Encouraging integrated resource management by assisting stakeholders in the establishment of mechanisms that will ensure a coordinated and collaborative approach to research and monitoring;
- Facilitating institutional strengthening in governmental agencies responsible for the management of sea turtles, as well as in relevant academic and non-governmental organizations, by offering training and exchange programs;
- Facilitating institutional strengthening by developing and promoting the basic capabilities and skills required to identify, analyze and resolve issues relevant to the region's marine and coastal resources;
- Supporting the standardization of approaches and methodologies by developing and disseminating standardized procedures and criteria for sea turtle population assessment, monitoring, and recovery;
- Promoting public participation by promoting the active involvement of all sectors of society in the management and conservation of sea turtles;
- Encouraging policy-oriented research; that is, basic and applied research that supports environmental policy needs and decision-making and keeps policy-makers aware of advancing knowledge;
- Promoting the exchange of information among the region's environmental agencies and organizations, thus strengthening information management capabilities and increasing communication among principal stakeholders;
- Promoting the joint management of transboundary resources by establishing, maintaining and/or strengthening mechanisms for collaboration; and
- Fund raising to support research, management, conservation, population monitoring, community development, and public outreach/education priorities.



“Caribbean sea turtles have been relentlessly exploited for millennia, and are severely reduced from historical levels of abundance. Notwithstanding, the Caribbean is now the only region on Earth where you can find at least some populations of all sea turtle species rising. This is the direct result of some of the most innovative and persistent conservation planning in the world – all nations are involved and everyone is welcome at the table.”

~ Karen Eckert, Executive Director, WIDECAST

ACHIEVING SUCCESS

As a result of WIDECAST’s cooperative structure and apolitical advocacy, a number of important achievements have been realized in the Wider Caribbean Region, including the creation of an inclusive mechanism for information-sharing within and among range states, a significantly enhanced use of science in sea turtle management and policy-making, and broad improvements in the protection offered to sea turtles by national legislation (revised in more than a dozen nations) and regional agreements.

The network, comprised of dedicated professionals – government officers, university professors, NGO representatives, and community leaders – has successfully led efforts to survey critical habitats, initiate sea turtle population monitoring programs at key sites throughout the region, reduce (and often eliminate) illegal sea turtle product sales, develop standard guidelines and criteria to meet research, management and eco-tourism objectives, establish marine-theme curriculum activities in Caribbean schools, organize citizen involvement (e.g. hatchling rescues, beach clean-ups, exhibitions), generate livelihood choices for poachers, and create models for revenue-generation in rural areas, among many other achievements. These efforts have been largely defined by comprehensive national ‘sea turtle recovery plans’ (developed by WIDECAST under the auspices of the CEP/SPAW Programme) for 11 nations and in draft for 12 more.

More than 1,000 Caribbean biologists and managers have been trained by WIDECAST-affiliated experts in recent years, clearly resulting in increased protection, enhanced public awareness, broadening allocations of resources, and intelligent dialoguing on important issues ... and this, in turn, has raised the level of receptivity to innovation involving co-management, incentive driven conservation, and multilateral approaches.



BUILDING ON SUCCESS: 2006-07 WORK PLAN

The WIDECAST workplan for the next biennium (2006-2007) will emerge directly from the accomplishments of the last, and will focus, *inter alia*, on:

- Maintaining WIDECAST's regional network of sea turtle professionals to track conservation priorities, opportunities, and impending crises;
- Working with Caribbean governments to strengthen and harmonize national regulatory regimes as they pertain to sea turtles;
- Supporting the efforts of Caribbean governments and NGOs to design science-based sea turtle management strategies;
- Implementing priority recommendations in national *Sea Turtle Recovery Action Plans* (STRAPs), with a focus on SPAW Parties, and finalizing 3 additional STRAPs;
- Facilitating and overseeing a representative regional network of standardized Index Sites for monitoring the population status of Caribbean sea turtles, and informing regulatory authorities of trends;
- Finalizing standardized research tools, such as sea turtle data management software that will enable range states to compare and combine national databases in order to assess population trends at biologically relevant scales;
- Strengthening WIDECAST's regional Marine Turtle Tagging Centre (MTTC) at the University of the West Indies, Barbados;
- Train a regional Marine Turtle Trauma Response Corps (MTTRC) to ensure an informed local response to injured sea turtles; create procedures manuals to guide first responders and clinical staff in the treatment of disease and injury, and a databank of injuries, clinical techniques, and accredited rescue centers;



- Collaborating with the region’s most experienced field biologists to develop peer-reviewed procedures manuals for Index Site monitoring and, similarly, to develop standardized protocols for sea turtle tagging, remote telemetry, genetic analysis, necropsy and tissue sampling, and other modern field techniques;
- Identifying pilot sites for refining and replicating innovative approaches to conservation challenges, including community-based income-generating alternatives to sea turtle hunting, reducing sea turtle bycatch in artisanal and commercial fisheries, reducing illegal trade, embracing fishermen in systematic stock monitoring, and promoting co-management agreements in rural areas;
- Laying the foundation for a “Sea Turtle Ecotourism Certification Program” to publicize standard operating procedures (SOPs) for tour operators, train operators (emphasizing community-based operators) to implement SOPs, create a certification/audit process to ensure program quality (including both conservation and socio-economic benefits), and market approved sites;
- Developing a comprehensive website (www.widecast.org) on the biology and status of Caribbean sea turtles, the national and regional regulatory framework, a summary of standard guidelines and other technical tools, descriptions of local sea turtle projects (including goals and objectives, achievements, ongoing programs, and needs), and sector-specific pages designed for educators, coastal landowners, tour guides, and other stakeholders;
- Developing and disseminating basic outreach tools, such as beach management guidelines for hotels situated on nesting beaches, multilingual curriculum materials, and DVD-based training resources;



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APPENDIX I

Source: excerpted from Eckert, K.L. and A.H. Hemphill. 2005. Sea Turtles as Flagships for Protection of the Wider Caribbean Region. MAST (Journal of Maritime Studies) 3(2) and 4(1):119-143.

The use of flagship species to promote intergovernmental policy, and specifically to promote collaborative, multilateral management of shared species and seascapes, is embraced in the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR) by the Caribbean Environment Programme (CEP). The UNEP Regional Seas Programme is implemented in the Caribbean Sea by the Action Plan for the Caribbean Environment Programme (APCEP), initiated in 1974 at the request of Caribbean governments, by Decision 8/11 of the Second Session of the Governing Council of UNEP (UNEP 1983). The Action Plan outlines programs of assistance, institutional strengthening, and technical cooperation, and in 1983 led to the adoption of a legal framework – the Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region (Cartagena Convention) – which entered into force in 1986.

The Cartagena Convention is supplemented by three protocols on: oil spills, specially protected areas and wildlife, and pollution from land-based sources and activities. The Protocol Concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPA), which came into force in 2000, 'is arguably the most comprehensive regional wildlife protection treaty in the world'; with provisions on environmental impact assessment, planning and management regimes, and buffer zones, as well as a range of protection measures

(including species recovery plans), it reflects much of the 'best in modern thinking on wildlife protection and management' (Freestone 1990: 368). Six species of Caribbean-occurring species of sea turtle are listed in Annex II, affording them the full weight of protection under the Cartagena Convention, and strategically positioning these species in a role with strong implications for regional policy.

The impetus for development of the APCEP was, of course, broader than sea turtles, and explicitly focused on goals related to strengthening the capacity of constituent states and territories 'for implementing sound environmental management practices [to] achieve the development of the region on a sustainable basis' (Preamble: UNEP 1983). Once these goals were articulated, however, sea turtles played a uniquely catalysing role in implementing the intergovernmental agenda. Based on recommendations from the First Meeting of Government-Nominated Experts to Review the Draft Action Plan (UNEP 1980), concern over the status of shared sea turtle stocks and their habitats, including coral reefs and 'turtle grass beds', was the basis for APCEP project 6/1, which was ranked among the first cohort of 'projects of common interest' to be implemented as a matter of priority (UNEP 1983). The sea turtle section of APCEP 6/1, implemented in partnership with the Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Recovery Team (now known as the Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network, WIDECAST), was among the first funded initiatives of the new Caribbean Environment Programme (UNEP) (UNEP 1985, 1989b).

From the earliest days of negotiation surrounding the priorities of the CEP, the region's sea turtles have served as a flagship for the development of models to ensure international cooperation in preventing the further decline of depleted living resources, in restoring them to former levels of abundance, and in maintaining them for sustainable use (Frazer 1985). Frazer observed that the methodology necessary to achieve these goals may also have 'more immediate benefits, even beyond the protection of six endangered or threatened species'; specifically, use of the sea turtle flagship for protection of critical coastal habitat like mangrove forests, seagrass beds, coral reefs, and pristine beaches could play an important role in safeguarding the region's economic foundations in fisheries and tourism and 'should be seen as part of an over-all plan to enable other species to flourish as well.'

National Sea Turtle Recovery Action Plans (STRAPs) were among the first contributions to the Caribbean Environment Programme Technical Report Series (e.g. Sybesma 1992).

Each STRAP is tailored specifically to local circumstances and discusses the following issues: the national status and distribution of sea turtles; major causes of mortality; the effectiveness of existing legislation; the present and historical role of sea turtles in local culture and economy; and recommendations for research, management, public awareness, and conservation initiatives. In the past decade, implementation of STRAP recommendations has resulted in changes in fisheries regulations; designation of protected areas; realization of long-term sea turtle population monitoring programs; adoption of standardized record-keeping and database management protocols; training of enforcement and natural resource officers; development of public awareness materials; creation of grassroots organizations; promotion of sustainable livelihoods in marginalized communities; a commitment to new partnerships (such as co-management); and a broadly enhanced capacity for sea turtle management within the nations participating in the CEP.

The experience of developing Sea Turtle Recovery Action Plans has set an example for other taxa-specific initiatives under the aegis of the CEP. Among these examples are the consultative processes that led to the Regional Management Plan for the West Indian Manatee (UNEP 1995). In 1994, a UNEP meeting of experts concluded that 'in light of the successful sea turtle recovery effort of WIDECAS... a similar structure would be desirable for the implementation of manatee activities in the region [including] the need to establish in each country, in consultation with the relevant governments, national recovery teams and country co-ordinators that will assist with the preparation of the country's recovery plan and implementation of relevant conservation activities at the national level' (UNEP 1994:10). Most recently, again building on the WIDECAS experience, the UNEP Caribbean Environment Programme will convene a 'Regional Workshop of Experts on the Development of the Marine Mammal Action Plan for the Wider Caribbean Region' in Barbados, 18-21 July 2005 (A. Vanzella-Khoury, UNEP, personal communication).

In 2002, UNEP adopted the sea turtle as the logo of the Caribbean Environment Programme and cited the region's efforts to 'promote best management practices for turtle survival, such as community-based eco-tourism, alternatives to beachfront lighting, protecting coral reefs and other feeding habitats, and improving law enforcement and the regulatory framework' as evidence that, 'through the Caribbean Environment Programme, governments are co-operating to create a more sustainable future for marine and coastal resources in the Wider Caribbean Region' (UNEP 2001).

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APPENDIX II

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APPENDIX III

Dr. Karen L. Eckert received her Bachelor's Degree in Biology with Highest Honors from Principia College in 1980, and later a Certificate in Global Policy Studies (1987) and a doctorate in Zoology (1988) from the University of Georgia. Her Certificate thesis was entitled, "Multilateral Conservation - A Critique of Past and Present Efforts in the Wider Caribbean Region"; her Dissertation was entitled, "Nesting Biology of the Leatherback Sea Turtle, *Dermochelys coriacea*". She has been active for more than two decades in the fields of sea turtle research and international conservation policy. She is currently Executive Director of the Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network (WIDECAST) and an Assistant Research Scientist on the faculty of Duke University, North Carolina. She is based at the university's Nicholas School Marine Laboratory.

WIDECAST embraces the largest regional network sea turtle research and conservation projects in the world, and is tasked with preventing the extinction of six species of endangered sea turtles in the Caribbean basin. Volunteer Country Coordinators serve in nearly 40 Caribbean states and territories, and the network emphasizes science-based tools in national policy-making and community conservation initiatives. Experts work closely with Country Coordinators, as well as with local WIDECAST Partner Organizations, to develop comprehensive national-level "Sea Turtle Recovery Action Plans". WIDECAST assists government agencies and non-government groups in the implementation of priority Action Plan recommendations, as well as in the design and implementation of regionally harmonized research and management projects.

This innovative program is a model for multilateral marine resource management in the Caribbean region and throughout the world. For her work as Executive Director of WIDECAST, Dr. Eckert was inducted into the "Global 500 Roll of Honour for

Environmental Achievement" by the United Nations in 1994. UNEP has characterized her as "one of the most important figures in conservation and grassroots community empowerment in the field of endangered species in the Wider Caribbean Region." In 1996 she was among the first cohort of Pew Fellows in Marine Conservation, a prestigious 3-yr fellowship that specifically recognized her efforts to restore depleted sea turtle populations and to promote sustainable coexistence between Caribbean peoples and their marine resources. Most recently she received the 2003 Chevron-Texaco Conservation Award for "providing the world with a unique model that shows how people and marine life are not only able to coexist, but to flourish."

In addition to her work with WIDECAS, Dr. Eckert's personal research has taken her through-out the Western Atlantic, and into the Mediterranean Sea, Eastern Tropical Pacific, and Southeast Asia. She is a valued consultant to many governments and inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations. She has published numerous scientific and general interest articles, technical manuals, and policy documents. Her most recent book, "Sea Turtles: An Ecological Guide" (Gulko and Eckert, 2004) is available from Mutual Publishing, Honolulu.

She is a member of the U.S. Pacific and the Atlantic/Caribbean Sea Turtle Recovery Teams, and the Marine Turtle Specialist Group of the IUCN Species Survival Commission. She served as Senior Editor of the Marine Turtle Newsletter, a scholarly bilingual publication with subscribers in more than 100 nations, for ten years (1988-1997), and is now a member of the Editorial Board.