INTERNATIONAL SEA TURTLE SOCIETY

September 25, 2005

Sheryan Epperly
Sea Turtle Team Leader
NOAA Fisheries/SEFSC
75 Virginia Beach Drive
Miami, FL 33149

Dear Sheryan:

I am writing to personally thank you for the NOAA Fisheries' generous support of last year's 25th Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation. The 25th Symposium was a great success with approximately 1000 attendees from 70 nations. I recently attended the annual board meeting of the International Sea Turtle Society and the ISTS Treasurer (Ed Drane) reported that the 25th Symposium was also a financial success. The donations we received facilitated travel grant awards to approximately 130 students and specialists from various regions of the world. The donations also helped support logistical costs associated with the symposium (e.g. audiovisuals, interpretation services, etc). Your support was instrumental to the great success of the 25th Annual Symposium. Finally, due to the success of the 25th Annual Symposium (including a very successful auction), the ISTS is now in good financial shape for planning future meetings

In case you need documentation of the symposium for your records, I have attached a report published in the Marine Turtle Newsletter describing the accomplishments of the symposium and a program showing the extensive number of presentations. Ed Drane (the ISTS Treasurer) has an itemized budget of how your funds greatly benefited the symposium. If you need a copy of the budget or any other information, just contact me. Again, I would like to thank you for your support of the 25th Annual Symposium, and I look forward to seeing you in April at the upcoming 26th Annual Symposium in Greece.

Best regards,

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Meeting Reports

The 25th Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation, Our Silver Anniversary Symposium. Savannah, Georgia, USA, January 18th-22nd, 2005

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With registrants from over 70 nations, a crowd of almost one thousand sea turtle biologists, conservationists, and enthusiasts attended the "Silver Anniversary Sea Turtle Symposium" in Savannah, Georgia. The schedule included an initial two days of regional meetings followed by three days of the main symposium, and a final day that included the Marine Turtle Specialist Group (MTSG) meeting. The venue for the symposium proved to be very functional. The meeting facilities included a Harborside Center that served as the location for the opening social, the poster sessions, and the coffee breaks. Thanks to the efforts of Janet Hochella (the Vendor Chair) and other volunteers, an excellent "Turtle Square" area was set up in the Harborside Center that included kiosks for vendors and many sea turtle organizations. The location of the hotel on River Street in the historic district of Savannah also proved to be very functional since there were numerous restaurants, pubs, shops, and historic landmarks within walking distance.

The main portion of the symposium started on Tuesday evening with the opening socials that drew a capacity crowd. The congregating of this many sea turtle biologists/conservationists generated a synergistic atmosphere for scientific discussions and development of collaborations that exemplify the significance of the annual symposium. The symposium had a full schedule of events and state-of-the-art presentations regarding the biology and conservation of sea turtles including over 125 oral presentations, 260 poster presentations, and a series of workshops regarding education and conservation. Fortunately, with that many presentations, as well as numerous other events, attendees were kept aware of all schedules by an excellent printed program produced by the efforts of Kristy Long and Barbara Schroeder. The Program Chair, David Owens, the Program Committee Coordinator, Kartik Shanker, and the entire Program Committee should be commended for the exhaustive efforts in putting together a great program for the 25th Symposium.

The meeting's theme "A Quarter Century of Advancements that Propel Us into the Future" was highlighted by the first day of invited talks in front of the entire assemblage. The symposium was initiated by a keynote address by John Avise, a world-renowned geneticist whose laboratory has been at the forefront of genetic studies in sea turtles. Dr. Avise provided a world-class presentation that focused on the role of genetics and evolutionary biology in the 21st Century. The first oral presentation session of the symposium (organized by Karen Bjorndal) highlighted this year's theme by focusing on "Insights from Long-Term Research Programs". The session included an international slate of speakers that described the lessons learned from a variety of long-term sea turtle programs conducted throughout the world. The session covered a variety of subjects regarding the biology and conservation of sea turtles, including topics that are currently receiving much interest, such as the effect of longline fisheries on the pelagic stages of some sea turtle populations. The initial afternoon session highlighted the fact that the long-term implementation of effective management strategies can halt downward trends and enhance the recovery of sea turtle populations. The initial talk of the session by Graeme Hays discussed the theoretical dynamics of extinction and recovery in sea turtle populations. The next series of talks provided long-term examples that show "conservation is working", including the history and current status of populations such at the Kemp's ridley, the olive ridley on the Pacific coast of Mexico, and the Atlantic leatherback in St. Croix. The historical trends and current status of nesting of greens and leatherbacks on the Atlantic coast of central Florida were also described. The afternoon session also discussed "populations of concern". In particular, data regarding the Pacific leatherback was presented. Additionally, the nesting trends and current status of loggerhead nesting in central Florida was discussed, as well as the nesting of olive ridleys in India, and leatherbacks in Atlantic Africa. The afternoon session also included an overview of the Marine Turtle Conservation Act, which has the potential of significantly enhancing sea turtle conservation through the funding of international collaborations. Collectively, the first day's sessions included an impressive group of speakers that provided an overview of lessons learned over the past quarter century and highlighted areas of concern and emphasis for the future.

Days two and three of the symposium included a wide variety of oral presentation sessions that addressed a full range of topics including population biology, ecology, behavior, genetics, nesting beaches, pathology and disease, fisheries, management, public education, and social and cultural issues. Special sessions were also held that focused on the sensory biology of sea turtles, and on the design, methods, and analysis of tagging studies. Keynote speakers started off several of the sessions. For example, Nicholas Mrosovsky presented a stimulating keynote presentation regarding the potential evolutionary implications of moving nests and, in classic Mrosovsky fashion, he suggested a provocative alternative to the practice. Ken Lohmann provided a keynote presentation regarding the orientation behavior of sea turtles, and William Kendall described state-of-the-art methodology and analysis for tagging studies. The diverse array of topics allowed biologists and conservationists from around the world to present their recent data and stay up-to-date on the latest techniques and scientific findings. Further, as in previous years, the symposium provided an avenue for communication between researchers, including the development of new collaborations. The

communication and education benefits of the symposium exemplify the significance of the Annual Sea Turtle Symposium.

Poster Session

A major goal of this year's symposium was to significantly increase the emphasis on the poster presentations. Poster presentations represent a major avenue for conveying information at scientific meetings, and posters are more appropriate and effective than oral presentations in many situations. To enhance this year's poster sessions, two specific time periods per day, with no conflicting events, were scheduled for the poster sessions. Additionally, the poster sessions were held in the Harborside Center, which proved to be an ideal setting for viewing and discussing posters. Over 260 posters were presented at this year's symposium, which represented a phenomenal amount of information. The overall scientific quality of the posters was impressive. The energetic conversations taking place throughout the poster sessions area clearly exemplified the significance of the poster sessions to this year's symposium. The success of the poster sessions would not have been possible without the diligent efforts of Bill Irwin, the Poster Session Chair.

Freshwater Turtle Workshop

On Tuesday afternoon prior to the opening social, a Freshwater Turtle Workshop was held. The workshop was organized by Chuck Shaffer and the agenda included a full series of well-known turtle researchers such as Whit Gibbons, Roger Wood, Colin Limpus, Anders Rhodin, and Peter Pritchard. Many of these presentations discussed general concepts in turtle biology and conservation that were directly applicable to sea turtles. As such, it was an ideal workshop to be associated with the Annual Sea Turtle Symposium. Chuck Schaeffer should be commended for his efforts.

Workshops and Video Presentations

Throughout the symposium, a series of workshops were held over the noon hour. Several educational workshops were conducted. One highlighted the interactive DVD "Journey of the Loggerhead" by Katy Garland. Another outlined an activities manual for "Sea Turtles: An Ecological Guide (sponsored by WIDECAST). The WWF sponsored a workshop on longline fisheries, and an "Operation Migration" workshop was presented that discussed the potential use of ultralight aircraft in sea turtle research. On Wednesday evening, a full schedule of sea turtle videos were presented that covered topics ranging from loggerhead lost years to specific conservation techniques for sea turtles.

Archie Carr Student Presentation Awards.

An integral part of the Annual Sea Turtle Symposium is the encouragement of student research and acknowledgement of student presentations. Student presentations act as a vital "training experience" for future leaders in sea turtle conservation and biology. The ISTS is fortunate that the Chelonian Research Foundation has been a strong supporter of student presentations and the sponsor of the student awards. The continued emphasis on student presentations and awards during the annual symposium will, no doubt, have a significant impact on the future of sea turtle biology and conservation. The ISTS gratefully acknowledges the Chelonian Research Foundation for their support and foresight. This year's Awards Committee was again chaired by Jeannette Wyneken and Lisa Campbell. Additionally, there were many volunteer judges that were instrumental in evaluating over 100 student poster and oral presentations. The awards were presented at the banquet by Anders Rhodin, Jeanette Wyneken, and Thane Wibbels. A total of 8 awards were presented (four First Place and four Runner-up Awards). The Awards were split between "Conservation" and "Biology" categories. First Place Award for biology oral presentations went to Louise Brooks of the Moss Landing Marine Laboratories and the Runner-up Award went to Lucy Hawkes of the Marine Turtle Research Group, UK. First Place Award for Biology poster presentations went to Kimberly Reich of the University of Florida, and the Runner-Up Award went to Michael P. Jensen of the University of Aarhus, Denmark. First Place Award for conservation oral presentations went to Catherine McClellan of the Duke Marine Laboratory. First Place Award for conservation poster presentations went to Kristine Halager of Florida Atlantic University, and two Runner-up Awards in conservation poster presentations went to Katherine Mansfield of the Virginia Institute of Marine Sicence and Rodrigo C. Almeida Santos of the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Brazil.

Results of the Auction

The silent auction and live auction were a great success this year, and they were the most profitable over the history the symposium. The success of the live auction can be attributed to the auctioneer talents of Rod Mast, the organizational efforts of Debbie Sobel, and the efforts of the many volunteers. Rod Mast, with the help of Jennifer Homcy, was once again instrumental in helping to generate an altruistic and amusing atmosphere for bidding on auction items. The most recent figures indicate that approximately $17,500 was raised by the auction. Everyone should be commended in helping raise this record-setting amount. These funds have always been paramount in helping support student travel and other basic symposium expenses.

Banquet

The Banquet drew a capacity crowd of approximately 450 attendees and the consensus was that the meal was quite good this year. The banquet festivities included a keynote address by Peter Pritchard, the presentation of the Archie Carr Student Awards, the acknowledgement of key organizers, and a preview of the location for next year's symposium. Peter Pritchard presented an entertaining and informative keynote address that provided a historical perspective of sea turtle conservation and the Marine Turtle Specialist Group. He included many historical pictures that showed many sea turtle biologists in their younger years. He also provided many colorful historical anecdotes. His talk was ideally suited for the Silvery Anniversary Symposium. The Archie Carr Awards for Student Presentations were then announced. Heather Kalb (the Volunteer Chair) and Thane Wibbels gave a presentation acknowledging the numerous volunteers that contributed to the success of the symposium. The final event at the banquet was a presentation by Dimitris Margaritoulis. He gave the crowd a glimpse of the great venue for next year's symposium. He showed a variety of wonderful photos of Greece. So, start thinking about your travel to the 26th Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology

and Conservation, which will be held in Greece. It should be a great symposium! The banquet then ended and the dance began to the sounds of the band "Tequila". Many danced for hours, whereas a large crowd also migrated to the lobby to continue conversations regarding sea turtle biology and conservation.

Regional Meeting

A major benefit of the annual sea turtle symposium is that it provides a forum for regional meeting for sea turtle organizations. During the 25th Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation, regional meetings were held on Monday and Tuesday prior to start of the main symposium. These regional meetings included RETOMALA Latin American Reunion, WIDECAST, African, Mediterranean, and the IOSEA (Indian and South East Asia). A wide variety of regional and international topics were discussed at these meetings, which will help coordinate current and future sea turtle conservation efforts in these regions.

Plenary Meeting

The Plenary session was held on Friday afternoon of the symposium. The first item of business was a travel committee report given by Hoyt Peckham. He summarized the amount of funding available this year for travel grants ($60,000) and described the amounts distributed to each region. He also noted that next year there would be an emphasis on supporting the travel of students and specialists from Africa, since most were not able to attend this year due to difficulties associated with obtaining visas.

The next item of business was the Treasurer's report by Ed Drane. He indicated that last year's symposium had a large cash flow and large attendance, however, the meeting generated a deficit. This exemplifies the difficulty in planning a large symposium when you are often not certain of all donations until a time near the start of the meeting. However, he indicated that this year's symposium was currently doing well financially.

The next item of business was the resolutions. Three resolutions were brought to the floor and each passed. At that point there was an extensive discussion regarding the fact that several resolutions had been tabled and were not brought to the floor for voting. Several individuals, including Todd Steiner of the Sea Turtle Restoration Project, Marydelle Donnelly of the Ocean Conservancy, and Carole Allen of the Sea Turtle Restoration Project and HEART, all voiced strong opinions indicating that resolutions that were submitted on time and through normal procedures should be voted upon. Jack Frazier, the Chair of the Resolutions Committee, indicated that the resolutions had been tabled for technical reasons that needed to be rectified. The processing of resolutions currently presents a logistical problem for the ISTS, because historically the Board of Directors has only met once a year (i.e. at the symposium), and that is the only time when resolutions are reviewed. Therefore, the board is now beginning to meet more than once a year. Further, one of the priority items for discussion at the Board Meeting will be the development of optimal infrastructure for processing of resolutions.

The next item of business was the nominations. Brendan Godley (substituting for the Chair of the Nominations Committee) presented a slate of nominees recommended by the Nominations Committee. This slate included Michael Coyne for President-Elect, Manjula Tiwari for Secretary, Edwin Drane for Treasurer, Kartik Shanker, Brendan Godley, and Lisa Campbell for Board of Directors, Jeanette Wyneken, Angela Formia, and Larisa Avens for Nominations Committee. There was a motion and a second to accept the nominations. This was followed by discussion suggesting that accepting the nominations would prevent any nominations from the floor. The motion was then retracted and a motion was made and seconded to open the floor for nominations. Karen Eckert nominated Richard Van der Wal for Board of Directors and there was then a motion and second to close the nominations. A paper ballot was conducted for the nominees for the Board of Directors, and Kartik Shanker, Brendan Godley, and Lisa Campbell were elected. The remainder of the slate of nominees was then elected and the meeting was adjourned.

MTSG Meeting

The 25th Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation also facilitated the congregation of many members of the Marine Turtle Specialist Group of the IUCN. An MTSG meeting was held on the final morning of this year's symposium. A variety of topics were discussed including the infrastructure, activities, and goals of the MTSG. The new web site for the MTSG was highlighted at the meeting and it includes information on the MTSG and a number of topics that were discussed at the meeting (see web site at <http://www.iucn-mtsg.org/>.

Travel Grants

Due to the generous donations from sponsors and fund raising from last year's auction, the ISTS was able to provide travel grants in the amount of approximately $60,000 to students and specialists from countries throughout the world. Travel grants were awarded to 131 recipients, and these awards were distributed through the various travel chairs to recipients in Latin America, Africa, Asia/Pacific, Europe, the Caribbean, and the USA. These funds allow dedicated students and sea turtle specialists (who would otherwise not be able to attend) to travel to the symposium, give presentations, and interact with leading authorities on various aspects of sea turtle biology and conservation. The travel grant program has been a major avenue by which the ISTS and the Annual Sea Turtle Symposium has encouraged the development of sea turtle conservation programs world-wide. The presentations by these recipients represented a significant contribution to the agenda at this year's symposium. The ISTS would particularly like to thank Disney's Animal Kingdom for their continued support of the Disney Fellowships in Sea Turtle Conservation. The Disney Fellowships are an excellent method of acknowledging the contributions of individuals by helping cover their travel expenses to attend the symposium and present their research. The Travel Committee Chairs, Hoyt Peckham and Jeffery Seminoff, together with the regional travel chairs (Angela Formia, Nicholas Pilcher, Karen Eckert, Brendan Godley, Annette Broderick, Ana Barragan, and Alan Bolten) should be commended for their exhaustive efforts in reviewing applications and awarding the travel grants.

Symposium Sponsors

As the Annual Sea Turtle Symposium has grown over the past 25 years, so have the costs associated with the meeting. The assembly of approximately one thousand attendees brings with it a wide variety

of logistical expenses. For example, just the simultaneous translation and the audiovisual equipment can cost thousands of dollars. Further, the symposium has been successful in fostering the spread of sea turtle conservation due in part to the awarding of travel grants to bring in dedicated students and specialists from around the world, who would otherwise not be able to attend the symposium. In fact, over the past few years, the ISTS has been able to provide $60,000 or more each year in travel grants. The availability of external funding to support these expenses has greatly enhanced the impact of the symposium on the spread of sea turtle conservation over the past two decades. Therefore, the ISTS would like to acknowledge the generous support of all the donors. Their support ensures the success of the symposium, thus enhancing the communication and education of sea turtle biologists and conservationists world-wide. This year we were again fortunate to have many generous donors. We would particularly like to thank the Western Pacific Fisheries Management Council, NOAA Fisheries Office of Protected Resources, NOAA Fisheries Southeast Fisheries Science Center, Disney's Animal Kingdom, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Florida Power and Light, and an anonymous donor for being major sponsors of the 25th Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation. We would also like to acknowledge the generous donations from Turtle Time, Inc. (in Honor of Flo Vetter), Chelonian Research Foundation, Wildlife Computers, Ecological Associates, Grays Reef National Marine Sanctuary, Service Argos, Paul Norman of the Amelia Island Sea Turtle Watch, Inc., Erode Kuppuswami, and SEATURTLE.ORG. Furthermore, we would also like to acknowledge the large number of people who provided individual donations to help sponsor travel grants or rooms for travel grant recipients. Collectively, these donations ensure that the symposium will have an optimal impact on sea turtle conservation.

Volunteers and Key Organizers

The 25th Annual Symposium would not have been possible without the tireless support of hundreds of individuals. Heather Kalb, the Volunteer Chair, acknowledged many of these individuals at the banquet and they should all be commended for their dedicated efforts. The tireless efforts of the volunteers are exemplified by people such as Sandy McPherson (the symposium's Registrar), as well as Jaime Peña and Carlos de León (who coordinated all of the audiovisuals and assisted in registration). The ability to efficiently organize such a large international symposium was due to the organizational skills of our Meeting Coordinator, Donna Broadbent, and the ISTS Information Technology Specialist, Michael Coyne. Finally, it has been a great pleasure to help organize the 25th Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation. After working with the many volunteers who were instrumental to the success of the symposium, I can truly say that the ISTS represents a large family of enthusiastic and altruistic individuals who are dedicated toward a noble goal, the recovery of sea turtle populations world-wide.