

SEA TURTLES 2008

28th Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation in Loreto, Baja California Sur January 19-26, 2008

Plans for the 28th Annual Symposium on Sea Turtle Biology and Conservation (STS) are coming together nicely. The Symposium will take place in the coastal town of Loreto, Baja California Sur, Mexico, from January 19-26, 2008. The symposium will be a different sort of gathering this year, thanks to both the planning of the 2008 organizing committee, in Mexico and the U.S., and the venue itself.

This year's theme is Native Oceans, asking us to consider the relationship between sea turtles and humans and celebrate and learn about the world's turtle cultures, both past and present. We are making an extra effort to invite members of various indigenous groups working on sea turtle research and conservation programs. The Seri Indians of Sonora, Mexico will share their leatherback ceremony during this year's symposium. The Native Oceans theme also asks the question: How many turtles were there? In Baja, we get some fascinating insights into the former abundance of sea turtles based on accounts of native people, explorers and missionaries as well as whalers and early turtle hunters.

Combined, this information may give us a sense of what the ocean was once like. Another theme of the symposium this year is sustainability. This year we have an STS "green team" working on making the footprint of the meeting compatible with our values. Michael Coyne and the STS 2007 organizers have left us in good shape financially and have set a high bar for a smooth-running and fun meeting. We hope to build on that and send a healthy, green STS on to Australia in 2009.

WHY LORETO, BAJA CALIFORNIA?

The reasons are compelling. First, it is an ideal opportunity for the members of the STS from around the world to interact, share and learn with our colleagues on the Baja California Peninsula. What has happened on the peninsula over the past two decades is worth noting—a grassroots sea turtle conservation movement emerged from communities where turtles were hunted to the edge of extinction. We believe

there are now many new opportunities for fruitful collaboration between you and our colleagues in northwest Mexico and I'd like the chance to introduce you to them. It's likely that many members of the Grupo Tortuguero (the growing sea turtle network in northwest Mexico) would not be able to afford to attend the STS as many are fishers and low-income coastal residents and therefore wouldn't be able to afford the travel or the time away from home. Bringing the STS to them in Baja changes this.

In addition, this year the STS coincides with the tenth anniversary of the Grupo Tortuguero (you can read more at <http://www.grupotortuguero.org>). Turtles are making a comeback in northwest Mexico and we'll celebrate that together in Loreto. In a way, having the STS in Baja at the tenth anniversary of the Grupo Tortuguero is a gift to the people working on one of the front lines of sea turtle conservation.

Another reason for hosting the meeting in Loreto is this is the "Year of the Sea Turtle" in Mexico. As the region's sea turtles return, people are faced with some new decisions about how to manage them. New marine protected areas and sea turtle reserves have been decreed while others have been proposed by fishers and coastal residents and supported by the state and federal governments. A new livelihood alternative associated with the protected areas is ecotourism. While visiting Baja, you'll have the chance to learn about the reserves and participate in an emerging ecotourism economy. We deliberately chose to hold the STS in the town of Loreto rather than one of the existing coastal mega-developments such as Cabo San Lucas in favor of spreading our dollars among many people and embracing a different model for tourism over the more convenient mega-resort choice. We want to be clear here that this choice begs your patience and planning as well as your responsibility for your own consumption and waste in order to be successful. Think: organic tequila, reusable cups, short showers, biodegradable soap, walks across the plaza and sustainable seafood!

We hope that you come early to Baja and stay long. It is gray whale calving season on Baja's Pacific coast, the birding is excellent and the towns, islands and bays of the peninsula are wonderful to explore. ■

ASSOCIATED EVENTS

One of the highlights of the meeting will be a mini-symposium on binational sea turtle conservation and research in the Californias held Tuesday the 22nd. For more information, please contact Jeffrey Seminoff (email: Jeffrey.Seminoff@noaa.gov). The 28th Symposium will also serve as the venue for the 10th Annual Meeting of the Grupo Tortuguero together with the meeting of Latin American Sea Turtle Specialists (RETOMALA), to take place in the Municipal Auditorium in Loreto. The coordinators for this meeting are Omar Chassin (email: chassin@oikos.unam.mx) and Chuy Lucero (email: chuy@grupotortuguero.org). As usual, the MTSG annual general meeting will occur the morning after the banquet, Saturday the 26th.

SYMPOSIUM REGISTRATION

You must register to attend the Symposium and to submit an abstract. The preferred registration method is to use the Symposiums web site at <http://iconferences.seaturtle.org>. There you will find everything you need to know about the Symposium in addition to a user-friendly interface for registration.

LODGING AND TRAVEL

The Organizers are currently negotiating discounted lodging and airfares, as well as a formal relationship with a travel provider that will allow for the purchase of tickets and the arrangement of pre- and post-symposium travel online. All STS travel and lodging as well as pre- and post-symposium travel will be coordinated by Journey Mexico (contact: Rebecca Scotti at rebecca@journeymexico.com). Because we are organizing such a large group of people and using every hotel, bus and taxi and plane in Loreto, we ask that you please coordinate your lodging and travel with Journey Mexico.

ON THE WEB

Check the website for regular Symposium updates at <http://iconferences.seaturtle.org> or contact ISTS President Wallace J. Nichols email: jnichols@oceanconservancy.org

"DO NOT DISTURB" SEA TURTLE PROTECTION CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED IN LOS CABOS, MEXICO

There are times when you're traveling that you just don't want to be disturbed. It's the same for sea turtles. When turtles are laying their eggs on Baja's beaches or when baby turtles are scurrying to the ocean, it's best that we leave them alone and let them do their thing. »»»»

Frequently, tourists find turtles nesting or hatchlings digging out of the sand while strolling in the beach, without knowing what to do or who to contact. A clever new campaign is bringing new turtle awareness to visitors of Los Cabos. Led by Graciela Tiburcio of The Sea Turtle Protection Program of Los Cabos in conjunction with PROFEPA, the Sea Turtle Network and 24 member hotels in the region, the campaign consists of the placement of "door hangers", the kind that say "do not disturb" on hotel room doors. They are designed to accomplish two tasks — to let people know not to disturb the "occupant turtles" and to provide guests all the necessary information when encountering sea turtles including phone numbers where tourists can call to report sea turtle sightings. Recommendations include: avoid touching the turtles, keep motorized vehicles off the beach, and turn lighting away from the beach.

The "door hangers" have been produced in both Spanish and English. The first edition of 10,000 door hangers was distributed during the 2007 nesting season among 24 sea turtle network member hotels in Los Cabos that work with the local sea turtle protection groups.

For more information on the Los Cabos sea turtle network, call 01152 (624)105-0903 or email Graciela Tiburcio at gtiburcio@prodigy.net.mx



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