

VELADOR

Science-Based Sea Turtle Conservation Since 1959

Issue 4, 2015

STC's First Turtle Expedition to Cuba



Members of STC's Cuba turtle expedition observe a nest excavation in Guanahacabibes National Park.

Since 2000, when Sea Turtle Conservancy (STC) waged a successful campaign to block a proposal by the Cuban government to reopen international trade of sea turtle products, STC has been trying to build collaborative relationships with Cuban sea turtle researchers. For example, STC facilitated the participation of two Cuban biologists in the International

: Sea Turtle Symposium. We included several young
: Cuban biologists as turtle Research Assistants in
: Tortuguero, Costa Rica, where they gained valuable field experience. And in Bermuda, a biology
: student from Cuba was sponsored to participate
: in a course offered by STC and our partners that
:

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Inside: Classroom Spotlight



Shopping Guide: Check out all the sea turtle-themed gift ideas!

Green Turtles Shatter Nesting Records in Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge!

Four decades ago, biologists thought green sea turtles might go extinct. But this year they laid a record number of nests at the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge—13,916 to be exact! This number is truly incredible when you consider that from 1982 to 2004, only 12,941 nests TOTAL were recorded over that entire time span.

This is the first time that green turtle nesting numbers have topped 12,000 in the Refuge. The previous record was 11,840 nests in 2013. The refuge's 20.5 miles of beach is home to 25-30 percent of the nation's endangered green sea turtle nests. The extraordinary nesting success could mean that more than 760,000 green sea turtle hatchlings will emerge this year. The trend for green turtle nesting in the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge on Florida's central east coast is evidence of an inspiring conservation success story brought about by over 30 years of support and collaboration among public agencies, nonprofit groups like Sea Turtle Conservancy (STC), researchers from the University of Central Florida and local citizens with a strong sense of stewardship for this globally important turtle rookery.

STC has been an active supporter and advocate for the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge since the idea was first conceived over 25 years ago. Without question, STC's long-term commitment to the Archie Carr Refuge and all the turtle nesting sites in Florida has contributed to the recovery of green turtles we are now seeing. We share in celebrating the good news about green turtles with numerous public and private partners that have also contributed in their own ways—and with STC's loyal members who have

By Lexie Beach
Communications Coordinator



Photo by Vince Lamb

VELADOR {bel.a.dor}

In Caribbean cultures, **Velador** translates as "one who stands vigil"—referring to turtle hunters who waited at night for turtles to come ashore. Now STC claims this title for its newsletter, and around the world STC's researchers and volunteers are replacing poachers as the new veladors. The **Velador** is published for Members and Supporters of the nonprofit **Sea Turtle Conservancy**. STC is dedicated to the conservation of sea turtles through research, advocacy, education and protection of the habitats upon which they depend.

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... from cover

teaches in-water techniques for studying sea turtles. Despite these efforts to build relations in Cuba, STC's ability to directly participate in turtle research or conservation in Cuba has been stymied by longstanding restrictions against American travel to the country...until now.

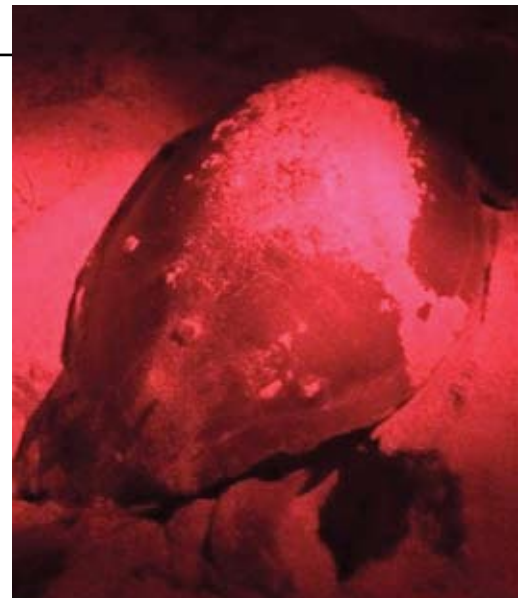
As widely reported in the news, President Obama recently took steps to improve diplomatic relations with Cuba. The U.S. Embassy in Havana has reopened, and the State Department announced new guidelines making it easier for American citizens to travel to Cuba by participating in authorized "People to People" programs. Immediately following this announcement, STC partnered with the Ocean Foundation and Holbrook Travel to organize a turtle research and cultural exchange expedition to Cuba that would meet the new qualifications and allow STC to explore opportunities for collaborating with sea turtle researchers in one of Cuba's most pristine national parks. Once our trip was approved by the State Department, STC officially opened registration to members and supporters, and all 20 spaces were filled rapidly.

STC's first expedition to Cuba took place over eight days in September, 2015. Leading the expedition were STC Executive Director David Godfrey and Scientific Director Dr. Emma Harrison. Also participating in the trip were an enthusiastic mix of STC donors, Florida turtle volunteers, scuba divers from around the US and the UK, an architect, and even a turtle conservationist from

Hawaii. During our journey through Cuba we interacted with the amazing and friendly people of Cuba; discovered a diverse and rapidly-changing culture; explored pristine natural resources; marveled at cities, cars and architecture preserved for a generation; learned about an explosion of urban-based organic farming; and, of course, observed a unique population of sea turtles nesting on Cuba's far western shore. To say the trip was amazing is an understatement - it was unforgettable.

Cuba hosts regionally-important nesting populations of hawksbills and green turtles. In addition, many nesting beaches and marine habitats around Cuba are in near-pristine condition and are ripe for long-term sea turtle research and recovery. During the course of the expedition, STC forged a strong new relationship with Cuban biologist Dr. Julia Azanza, who leads the turtle research project at Guanahacabibes National Park. Based on our interactions with Dr. Azanza, STC hopes to achieve a new era of support for sea turtle conservation in Cuba. Plans are already in the works for a return trip in 2016, when we hope to assist in the deployment of satellite transmitters on several nesting green turtles. Anyone interested in joining the 2016 expedition should contact David Godfrey at david@conserveturtles.org to inquire about reserving a spot. Like this year's expedition, spaces will fill up quickly. 🐢

**By David Godfrey
Executive Director**



Green sea turtle nesting in Guanahacabibes National Park.



Nesting beach in Guanahacabibes National Park.
Inset - David Godfrey, STC's Executive Director, at the turtle research camp in Guanahacabibes.

Holiday Gift Guide

A.



B.



C.



D.



E.



A. 2015 Ornament - featuring a leatherback sea turtle. Writing engraved on back. **\$9.95**

B. 2016 Sea Turtle Scenes Calendar - 11" x 17" (open) wall calendar features some of STC's favorite sea turtles in action. **\$12.95**

C. Mosaic Loggerhead Sea Turtle - beautifully crafted stone resin sculpture by Barcino. Each is hand painted for a unique mosaic porcelain finish. Measures L 5.1" x W 5.1" x H 1.7" **\$19.95**

D. Green Sea Turtle 3D Tagua Nut Necklace - 3D sea turtle has been carved into a Tagua Nut and attached to a leather cord as a necklace. Hand made in northwest Ecuador and provides economic incentives for the sustainable harvest of the tagua palm nut, *Phytelephas equatorialis*. **\$18.95**

E. Sea Turtle 8GB USB Flash Drive - plug-and-play, compatible with most Windows, Mac, and Linux operating systems. **\$19.95**

Visit conserveturtles.org/store to shop for these items and other great turtle gear!



F.

G.



H.



I.



J.



K.



F. I Love Turtles Peridot Dangle Earrings - sea turtle heart dangle earrings made from brass and alpaca with stylized STC logo. Fair Trade and handcrafted by artisans in their home. **\$21.95**

G. Loggerhead Sea Turtle Post Earrings - sterling silver loggerhead sea turtle! Created by Wildthings in Massachusetts, this unique loggerhead is available as a pair of post earrings. **\$22.95**

H. I Love Turtles Peridot Pendant - sea turtle heart charm made from brass and alpaca with stylized STC logo on a 16" silver plate chain w/2" extender. Fair Trade and handcrafted by artisans in their home. **\$21.95**

I. Hawksbill Sea Turtle Plush - adorable plush hawksbill sea turtle makes a great soft toy or collectible. The perfect gift for children ages 3 and up. 8.5". **\$9.95**

J. Tour de Turtles Shirt - cotton t-shirt available in adult sizes SM, MD, LG, XL & 2XL. Only available in white. **\$19.95**

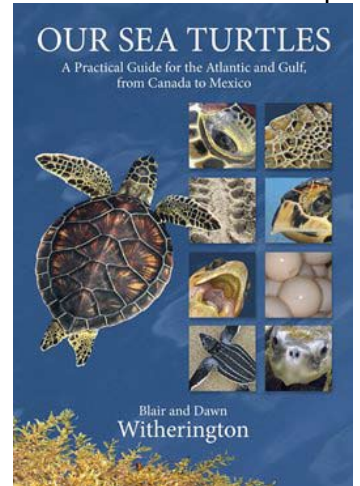
K. Sea Turtle Pendant - unique pendant plated with rhodium and inlaid with genuine opalite and crystals. Each pendant comes in a white box with an 18" chain. Approximatley 1" high. **\$29.95**

L.

M.

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O.



These companies are giving back to turtles by supporting STC's efforts when you shop on their website:

Cause-Related Partners



www.turtlelady.com



www.dharmawanderlust.com



www.caribesup.com



www.alexasmakinwaves.com



www.swimmingshelly.com



www.asimisilver.co.uk

L. Replica Sea Turtle License Plate - mock version of Florida's sea turtle speciality plate for the front of your car. Metal, size of a standard American license plate. **\$12.95**

M. Our Sea Turtles - Blair and Dawn Witherington intimately reveal the lives of sea turtles. Well-organized sections are lavishly illustrated. It is a guide for anyone who is the least bit curious about these fascinating marine animals. **\$28.95**

N. Rasta Peace Turtle T-shirt - relaxed fit 100% Cotton tee, with reinforced double-stitching on all seams. After dyeing they are washed and dried, pre-shrunk & ready to wear. Available in adult sizes SM, MD, LG, XL & 2XL, in green only with STC's logo on the left sleeve. **\$24.95**

O. Mosaic Sea Turtle Ornament - beautifully crafted stone resin sculpture by Barcino. Each is hand painted for a unique mosaic porcelain finish. Measures L 2.6" x W 3.3" x H 0.7" **\$9.95**

Classroom Spotlight

At the beginning of the 2015 school year, Tara L., a Spanish teacher with 10 years of experience, had planned to teach 399 students about sea turtles. Little did she know that a small group of those students would make a big impact for sea turtles. Sea Turtle Conservancy (STC) was humbled to be presented with a check for \$450 from the kids at Northern Heights Elementary in Washington! We sat down with Tara to find out more about her students and their efforts to save sea turtles.



Tara and the “turtle girls” from Northern Heights Elementary.

STC: How did you learn about Sea Turtle Conservancy?

TL: I fell in love with sea turtles after snorkeling with them in Mexico, and had already been following the Sea Turtle Conservancy when I decided to teach my Spanish students about them last year. When I was approached by some students to advise a “Save the Sea Turtles” fundraiser, I decided to do some more in-depth research into the STC, and was very impressed with the conservancy’s work in both the education about and protection of turtles.

STC: As a Spanish teacher, was our work in Spanish-speaking countries a factor in deciding to do this project?

TL: Most definitely! When I found out that STC had begun its work in Costa Rica, and has continued to work in various Central American countries, I knew it would be the best organization for my Spanish students. My students were able to connect conservation efforts with their learning in Spanish class, and they realized they could make a big difference. They were inspired by what they learned about these incredible animals, and they decided to take action. On a personal note, I was really excited about an organization that works in Costa Rica because I had the amazing opportunity to do volunteer work there when I was in high school.

STC: What about sea turtles drew your kids in?

TL: The kids were immediately fascinated by how beautiful and interesting these magnificent creatures are. When we started looking at all of the environmental and social problems sea turtles are facing, they wondered if they could do something about it. Our school is centered around international mindedness, and these incredible young people spend a lot of time thinking about how they can affect positive change in the world.

It began as one student’s inspired idea of being caring and compassionate towards others, and it turned into a whole-school effort to help protect the world’s tortugas marinas.

STC: How did you and your students raise the money for STC?


My students did an in-school fundraiser and raised over \$400 in one week, well beyond our initial goal of \$50-\$100! Our fundraising group (AKA the ‘turtle girls’, a group of 3rd graders) met after school on a weekly basis, sometimes putting in hours at a time. During the last week of the project they plastered the school’s walls with creative “Save the Sea Turtles” posters, spread information by word of mouth, and made announcements over the intercom about the campaign. The students were really excited about this project. They saw their piggy bank pennies (and more) turn into something very tangible, something that will hopefully help make a difference for the planet’s precious sea turtles. It was truly an incredible effort by all. ¡Qué vivan las tortugas marinas!

STC is also proud of these students! Projects such as this are representative of the small changes we can ALL make to save sea turtles. Thank you to Northern Heights Elementary students, faculty and staff for their incredible efforts to help sea turtles. If you have a similar story to share please contact Becca Gelwicks, STC Membership Coordinator, at Becca@conserveturtles.org.

**By Becca Gelwicks
Membership Coordinator**

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 Printed with vegetable based inks on recycled paper that is
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Giving Tuesday

On December 1, 2015 Sea Turtle Conservancy (STC) will be participating for a third time in #GivingTuesday. #GivingTuesday, which follows Thanksgiving, Black Friday and Cyber Monday in the US, was created as a day where everyone and anyone can contribute to non-profit organizations in their neighborhoods and around the world. #GivingTuesday provides one day to make a BIG difference! The past two years STC has been very fortunate to feel the support from our friends and donors. Last #GivingTuesday STC supporters raised nearly \$15,000 in one day for repairs to researcher living quarters in Tortuguero, Costa Rica! In 2013, you helped to raise over \$2,000 in a single day for sea turtle conservation efforts!

STC needs to call upon you again this year to help support the Barrier Island Center (BIC). The BIC, located in Melbourne Beach, FL in the heart of the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge, is an education and outreach center which provides free or low-cost programs to visitors, local schools and community members. These programs help to educate the public about the important and unique eco-systems of the barrier island, wetlands, and lagoon. These areas provide vital nesting and foraging habitat for sea turtles. Since the Barrier Island Center opened in 2008 over 245,000 adults and children have been able to learn through hands-on activities such as Eco-Explorers summer camps, oyster mat making, sand dune planting, and much more. Unfortunately, the BIC recently learned it would not be receiving an annual grant of \$15,000 to help fund education programs and other operating costs.

You can help! Join STC on December 1st, 2015 for #GivingTuesday. Use this hashtag and tag Sea Turtle Conservancy on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to show your support of educational programs in Florida. Help STC reach its goal of replenishing the \$15,000 lost by donating to the cause in one of three ways: online at www.conserveturtles.org/GivingTuesday, by calling 352-373-6441 or mailing a check with "Giving Tuesday" in the subject line. All checks received with Giving Tuesday in the subject line, will count towards the campaign (up to a total of \$15,000), even after December 1st, 2015. A portion of all donations will be matched by STC's Board of Directors. **Can we count you in for #GivingTuesday?**



A child helps paint a sea-life mural at the BIC.