



Leatherbacks— Going Faster Than You Think

In April 2007, scientists, corporations, conservation partners, publicists, and educators joined together to host a creative new kind of conservation awareness campaign: **the Great Turtle Race**. This major international event was organized by The Leatherback Trust, Tagging of Pacific Predators, Costa Rica’s Ministry of Environment and Energy, and Conservation International.

In the race, satellite tags on 11 female leatherbacks tracked the turtles’ migratory movements from the “starting line” at Playa Grande, Costa Rica, to the “finish zone” near Ecuador’s Galapagos Islands, where the leatherbacks forage. Ten of the turtles were sponsored by a corporation or other institution.

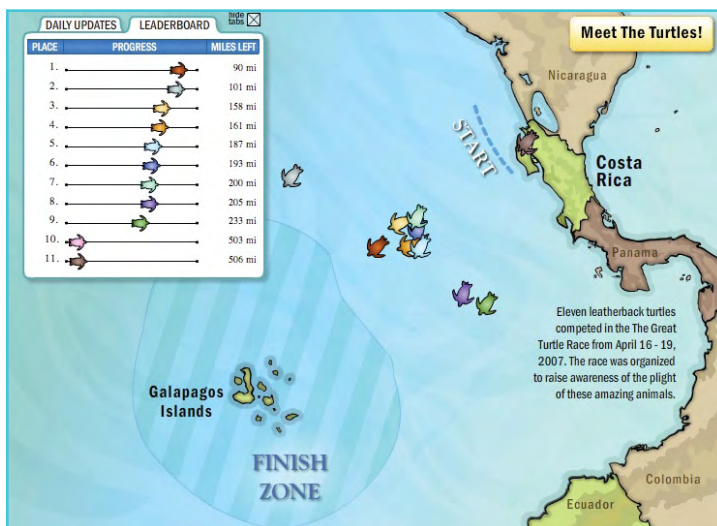
The eleventh turtle was named Stephanie Colburtle in honor of comedian Stephen Colbert. When notified of the tribute, Colbert introduced Stephanie and the Great Turtle Race to his audience of approximately one million fans on his hit Comedy Central show, “The Colbert Report,” providing updates on Stephanie’s progress throughout the race.

As a result of this and the hundreds of articles, television news reports, radio interviews, and online blogs covering the 14-day event, the Great Turtle Race captured the hearts, consciences, and fundraising dollars of U.S. and international audiences, reaching more than 28 million individuals in North America and more than 100 million internationally.

All of this was a great boon for leatherback turtles, which are “going faster than you think.” Leatherbacks are 100 million-year-old, massive sea animals that survived the dinosaurs but are now dangerously close to extinction. Their numbers have decreased at Playa Grande from

thousands of nesting turtles 10 years ago to fewer than 100 in the past five years. This online event raised funds to protect Playa Grande and raised awareness about what we humans can do—no matter where they live—to help protect sea turtles in our daily actions.

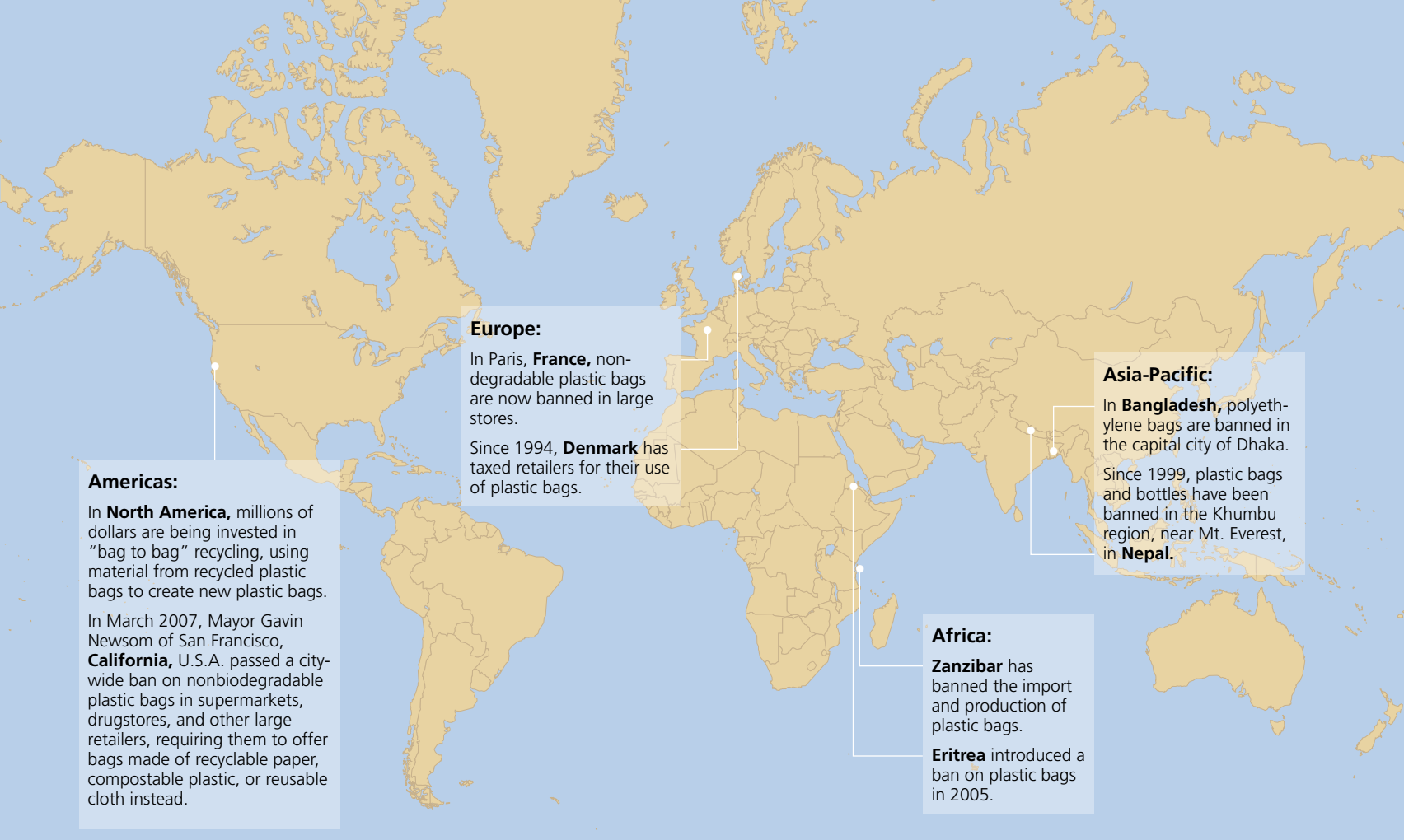
Stay tuned for a second Great Turtle Race, set to take place in May 2008. Keep an eye on www.greatturtle.com to find out more and cheer on your favorite turtle!



The turtles’ movements were updated every few minutes on this animated map on the homepage of www.greatturtle.com, hosted by Yahoo!.



Hint: Mr. Leatherback's silhouette is hidden in 11 different places in this issue of SWOT Report—in rock formations, in the water, and alongside his turtle friends. See the SWOT website for all 11 hiding places!



Americas:

In **North America**, millions of dollars are being invested in “bag to bag” recycling, using material from recycled plastic bags to create new plastic bags.

In March 2007, Mayor Gavin Newsom of San Francisco, **California**, U.S.A. passed a city-wide ban on nonbiodegradable plastic bags in supermarkets, drugstores, and other large retailers, requiring them to offer bags made of recyclable paper, compostable plastic, or reusable cloth instead.

Europe:

In Paris, **France**, non-degradable plastic bags are now banned in large stores.

Since 1994, **Denmark** has taxed retailers for their use of plastic bags.

Asia-Pacific:

In **Bangladesh**, polyethylene bags are banned in the capital city of Dhaka.

Since 1999, plastic bags and bottles have been banned in the Khumbu region, near Mt. Everest, in **Nepal**.

Africa:

Zanzibar has banned the import and production of plastic bags.

Eritrea introduced a ban on plastic bags in 2005.

Plastic bag policies are being implemented in many different locations around the world. These are a few examples.

Did you know that each year, thousands of sea turtles choke on plastic bags after mistaking them for jellyfish, a favorite food?

During the Great Turtle Race, race fans and I spread the word about the dangers of plastic pollution for sea turtles like me and for other animals in the ocean. As a result, more than 17,000 people have taken a personal online pledge to reduce their personal plastic consumption!

Governments and corporations around the world are also beginning to take note of this important issue. The map above shows a few examples, and I’d like to say “thanks!” and “great job!” to all of the leaders who are doing their part to reduce plastic pollution.

Be sure to read the article about plastic marine debris on pages 28–29 of the magazine to learn more about why plastics are so dangerous to ocean critters and how your daily actions can make a difference!



RIGHT: The turtle known as Billie, sponsored by Offfield Center for Billfish Studies, took first place on Day 11 of the Great Turtle Race, followed by Stephanie Colburtle and GITI Tires’ Champira in second and third places, respectively, on Day 12.

BELOW: Each time Stephen Colbert included the Great Turtle Race in his comedy sketches on “The Colbert Report,” website hits at www.greatturtlerace.com skyrocketed.

