



AT LEFT: A green turtle grazes on seagrass pastures in Hol Chan Marine Reserve, Belize. © PETE OXFORD

# Editor's Note

## Addressing Old Challenges with New Tools

Back in the days when “cut and paste” actually meant using scissors and glue (1983), an effort called the Western Atlantic Turtle Symposium (WATS) brought together hundreds of people to compile and review data and to collectively brainstorm measures to protect sea turtles in the 38-country-wide Caribbean region. Hindered as it was by the absence of computers, spreadsheets, e-mail, and GPS (global positioning system), WATS nonetheless created a groundswell of interest and of broad-scale regional commitment to sea turtle conservation.

Being the symposium coordinator for WATS was my first real conservation job (my paychecks were signed by Archie Carr), and it eventually took me to South America to write the Colombia National Report for WATS-2. While walking Colombia's Caribbean coast as part of my assignment, I met desperately poor fishermen who were struggling to feed their families. I repeatedly heard the saying, “*Tortuga vista es tortuga muerta*” (a turtle we see is a turtle we kill). Indeed, the first words that landed on my ears in one town were those of a street hawker bellowing, “*Arroz con tortuga!*” (rice with turtle). This was the heyday of Colombia's hawksbill shell trade, a time when people did not think twice about sea turtle stew on a restaurant menu and when the number of conservationists focusing on sea turtles was few. As you will learn in this volume, things have changed in South America.

WATS ultimately lost steam, but its essence remains intact. In fact, it built a network, changed the lives of conservationists, and compiled baseline data. The State of the World's Sea Turtle (SWOT) Program now works to achieve similar goals but at a scale and with tools that no one in the 1980s could have imagined. With the International Sea Turtle Society preparing to host its 36th Annual Symposium in Lima, Peru—the first in South America—this *SWOT Report* includes a special feature about that important region (pp. 14–27). It also showcases our first continent-wide maps of nesting biogeography and satellite telemetry, using data contributed by the SWOT team network.

As we continue to expand SWOT's global database of sea turtle biogeography, we also recognize the importance of grounding our efforts in local realities. Those are the places where conservation rubber meets the road. In this volume, we explore broad threats such as plastic pollution, ghost nets, and cold stunning. We also draw attention to special places such as Greece, Guinea-Bissau, Nicaragua, and São Tome and Príncipe, from which our partners share engaging stories of their challenges and successes.

Our series of regional-scale overviews began with Costa Rica in *SWOT Report*, vol. X, and builds here to include the entirety of South America. As we set our sights to the future, we plan to broaden our network even further so we can address every region in which sea turtles occur.

Thank you all,

Roderic B. Mast