

# VELADOR

Science-Based Sea Turtle Conservation Since 1959

Issue 3, 2023



## Help us Raise Funds for STC's In-Water Program this Giving Tuesday

STC Panama Coordinator Raúl García releases a juvenile green turtle tagged as part of STC's In-Water Research Project in Florida. García joined the Florida crew to obtain additional in-water research experience that will be useful for our work in Panama.

Sea Turtle Conservancy (STC) is hoping all of its supporters will participate in this year's Giving Tuesday Campaign, which seeks to raise funds for the critical in-water work we are doing to study and conserve sea turtles in the Gulf of Mexico. Though not as well-known as Black Friday or Cyber Monday, Giving Tuesday, which occurs the Tuesday after Thanksgiving (November 28 this year), is one day when everyone can join together to make a huge difference.

For Giving Tuesday last year, STC supporters raised \$60,000 for STC's research and conservation programs in Tortuguero, Costa Rica. STC has set its sights even higher this year, with a goal of raising \$65,000, which we are confident we can reach thanks to generous pledges from STC's Board of Directors to match up to \$33,000 for every dollar donated.

*continued on page 2...*

*Inside: Panama Update*



*Holiday Gift Guide*

... from cover

STC's In-Water Research Project in Florida has been in high gear over the last several years. The project, led by STC Biologist Rick Herren in collaboration with Dr. Ray Carthy at University of Florida's (UF) USGS Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, recently surpassed 300 sea turtle captures in the northeastern Gulf of Mexico. The overall goals are to study sea turtle distribution, demographics, health, movements, and threats in this important foraging habitat and to promote their conservation in the region.

Our research team is working on a variety of studies in collaboration with UF graduate students. We are finishing up three projects we began in 2019. These include an estimate of species abundance and distribution throughout Florida's Big Bend, a comparison of juvenile green turtle demographics between three widely separated foraging grounds, and a study of green turtle movement and behavior during the winter. Last year, we began working with a UF graduate student studying green turtle fibropapillomatosis or FP, which is a debilitating tumor-bearing disease linked to poor water quality. We also began studying green turtle health and diet using point-of-care devices to analyze blood gases and blood chemistry values in the field. These measurements can be used as reference values for the medical management of sea turtles under veterinary care and as a comparison with sea turtles at other developmental foraging grounds. Lastly, we are studying the movements and behavior of Kemp's ridley sea turtles in a warming Gulf of Mexico.

In addition to our research we are engaging more with the wonderful people who live in Florida's Big Bend and Panhandle. The Big Bend or Nature Coast is one of the least developed coastlines in Florida. We are working on a new education campaign to connect with residents and visitors alike on the importance of this coast for sea turtles and what they can do to help them survive in the future. As part of this work, STC is set to release a handy new smart phone app that will allow people to report turtle sightings on the water and provide STC with useful information for locating new sea turtle foraging hot spots.



## 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. 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)**. STC is dedicated to the conservation of sea turtles through research, advocacy, education and protection of the habitats upon which they depend.

*Executive Director*  
**David Godfrey**

*Scientific Director*  
**Dr. Roldán Valverde**

*Controller*  
**Pat McCloskey**

*Senior Accountant*  
**Erin Darling**

*Staff Accountant*  
**Kate Miller**

*Senior Research Biologist & Grants Manager*  
**Dr. Daniel Evans**

*Communications Coordinator*  
**Lexie Beach**

*Office Manager*  
**Kim Aslan**

*Membership Coordinator*  
**Evan Cooper**

*Biologist & Project Director*  
**Rick Herren**

*Research Assistant*  
**Margaret Liljestrom**

*Sea Turtle Lighting Project Manager*  
**Rachel Tighe**

*Sea Turtle Lighting Specialist*  
**Emily Asp**

*Sea Turtle Lighting Specialist*  
**Casie Hain**

*Development and Policy Coordinator*  
**Stacey Gallagher**

*BIC Community Stewardship Coordinator*  
**Sarah Rhodes-Ondi**

*Director, Costa Rica Operations*  
**Roxana Silman**

*Costa Rica Office Assistant*  
**Maria Laura Castro**

*Costa Rica Environmental Education Coordinator*  
**Georgina Zamora Quilez**

*Tortuguero Station Manager*  
**Jorge Brenes**

*Tortuguero Field Research Coordinator*  
**Carlos Calagua Yon**

*Tortuguero Asst. Field Research Coordinator*  
**Keithlyn Rankin**

*Tortuguero Education Coordinator*  
**Belkis Flores**

*Tortuguero Visitor Center Coordinator*  
**Guillermo Herrera**

*Panama Research Coordinator*  
**Cristina Ordoñez**

*Panama Research Coordinator*  
**Raúl García Varela**

*Panama Education & Outreach Coordinator*  
**Xavier Ow Young**

*Panama Indigenous Community Liaison*  
**Felipe J. Baker P.**



In-Water Research Project Director Rick Herren collects data from a juvenile green turtle that will help STC document growth rates and other survival factors. Research permits MTP #118 and NMFS #21327.

STC is deeply appreciative of all the support received from various corporate and private donors for the project. Our current project needs include a dedicated truck for towing our boat to and from various research sites, which will have the added benefit of allowing STC to respond quickly to turtle stranding events, such as cold stuns. We raised money in the past for this purpose, but during the pandemic truck prices shot up so high we are still short of our need.

We are hopeful that STC’s members will support the program this Giving Tuesday, when all donations will be matched 1:1 by the STC Board of Directors. With your support, STC will continue filling gaps in our knowledge about the sea turtle populations found in this important region, and we will apply that knowledge to effective conservation action.

**Help support STC’s Giving Tuesday Fundraiser by donating in one of three ways:**

1. Online at [conserveturtles.org/GivingTuesday](https://conserveturtles.org/GivingTuesday) or [facebook.com/conserveturtles](https://facebook.com/conserveturtles)
2. Call 352-373-6441 with your credit card info
3. Mail a check with “Giving Tuesday” in the subject line. All checks received with “Giving Tuesday” in the subject line will count towards the campaign if received by December 31. 🌀

## Panama Update

### Ngäbe indigenous women of Río Caña Return to their Ancestral Recipes with the award-winning Chef Mario Castellón

Many indigenous cultures continue to head towards extinction in America and with them a lot of knowledge of their ancestral food recipes. STC helped organize an event to benefit women in the region of Río Caña, Panama, site of STC’s Chiriqui Beach turtle conservation program. The program was called Ari Ugüenrien, which means “let’s cook together” in Ngäbere language.

“If we do nothing, our children and grandchildren won’t even know what our grandparents ate before us, and there are health problems because we’re

eating processed food. So that tourists can come to know about the history of Río Caña, we must do something.” says Emelida Smith, an artisan who participated in the project.

Río Caña is a small indigenous community located in the Ngäbe-Buglé Comarca of Panama, one of the largest indigenous areas of Panama, with some of the most important natural resources in the whole country. It’s important to

*continued on page 4...*

*continued from page 3...*

emphasize that the locals have lived and survived harmoniously with it for millenia. Far from the hustle and bustle of big cities and the Panama Canal, the main activities and economic income are derived from fishing, coconut harvesting, crafts and, in recent days, rural community tourism.

The community is characterized by the important participation of women and men in various activities that have marked positive changes, not only in its culture, but also in the conservation of their own natural resources. Thus, in recent years this community has been considered a regional model for conservation, due to its uninterrupted link for more than 20 years in the protection and conservation of sea turtles with STC.

Started three years ago, the objectives of the Ari Ugüenrien Project are based on the exchange of experiences and empowerment of the women of Río Caña, through an intensive cooking experience led by an award-winning and influential chef from the Panamanian food scene, which will value local ingredients from a sustainability perspective and the rescue of ancestral knowledge. The Ari Ugüenrien Project maintains an effort to grow and inspire the women of Río Caña in the field of gastronomy, saving their culture and being the first community project in the region that focuses on sustainability and local ingredients. This is in response to tourism that not only comes to enjoy nature, but also to connect with culture through food.

In the history of the Río Caña community, the role of its women has been fundamental. For the Ari Ugüenrien project, 15 women from Río Caña saw the need to empower themselves and show that their gastronomic culture depends on them, having an impact on the local economy. Most of these women are dedicated to their homes and children, are bakers, religious leaders, artisans, environmental leaders; and above all, they all have a great desire to learn.

Mario Castellón is considered one of the most influential chefs of the new and contemporary



Project participants pose with their certificate of completion alongside Chef Mario Castellón and Co-Founder Felipe Baker.

Panamanian cuisine, according to Forbes Central America and for The World's 50 Best Restaurants. Castellón's restaurant, Restaurante Maito Panamá, is listed in the six best in Latin America and included in the top 100 globally.

Castrellón, who has previously worked with women from other indigenous regions, intends to achieve the objectives of the project by promoting the empowerment of the women of Río Caña, leading gastronomic confidence in local ingredients, thus returning to ancestral recipes to save the culture.

“Río Caña is a gastronomic paradise, an explosion of flavors, here the women cook well, it has a lot of potential and we are going to continue promoting it,” says Castellón, while leading a workshop with the women of Río Caña. 🌿

**By Felipe Baker**

*STC Panama Indigenous Community Liason  
Ari Ugüenrien Project Co-Founder*



Chef Mario Castellón prepares a dish using a local ingredient called Calalu, which is an important staple in Ngbe cuisine. Photos by Victor Miller.

# Tour de Turtles

The 16th Annual Tour de Turtles marathon officially ended on November 1. So how did our 22 competitors fare? Read on to find out!

## Hardshells:

- 1st – Bella
- 2nd – Mamacita
- 3rd – Madame Leota
- 4th – Harriet
- 5th – Suzi
- 6th – Kelpy
- 7th – Marigold
- Puddlefoot
- 8th – Kiwi
- 9th – Cheddah
- 10th – Tippi
- 11th – Zee
- 12th – Marcia

## Leatherbacks:

- 1st – Pedro PaSCALE
- 2nd – Dr. Turtle
- 3rd – Tello
- 4th – Turtina
- 5th – Centennia
- 6th – Mikey
- 7th – Samana
- 8th – Leo
- 9th – Moana
- 10th – Opal

Hawksbill turtle Bella pulled out the win for the Chelonian competitors, swimming 1,519 miles from her nesting beach in Nevis to The Bahamas. Not far behind in 2nd place was green turtle Mamacita who traveled 1,466 miles after nesting in Tortuguero, Costa Rica. Rounding out the Top three was loggerhead Madame Leota from Vero Beach, FL.

Meanwhile in the Leatherback Race, Pedro PaSCALE passed by his competition with ease, swimming 3,794 miles after nesting in Panama. It was a photo finish for the other podium spots with leatherbacks Dr. Turtle, Tello and Turtina only separated by a couple dozen miles.



Pedro PaSCALE's migration map

Although not our fastest or farthest swimming turtle, juvenile green turtle Marcia from The Turtle Hospital won over the fans and took the People's Choice Award home to the Florida Keys.

Loggerhead turtle Kelpy set records of another kind, as she was the second largest loggerhead we've ever tagged, measuring an impressive 114.7 cm in curved carapace length. The only loggerhead larger was TinkerBell (114.9 cm) from the 2015 Tour de Turtles.

This year's race also had a very special last minute entry, sub-adult green turtle Zee from the Brevard Zoo Sea Turtle Healing Center. Zee was named by sponsors Susan and Howard Zemser in honor of their son, Midshipman Third Class Justin "Zee" Zemser.

Even though the official Tour de Turtles race has ended, you can continue to follow the turtles with our free STC Turtle Tracker App or on our website at: [conserveturtles.org/sea-turtle-tracking](http://conserveturtles.org/sea-turtle-tracking).

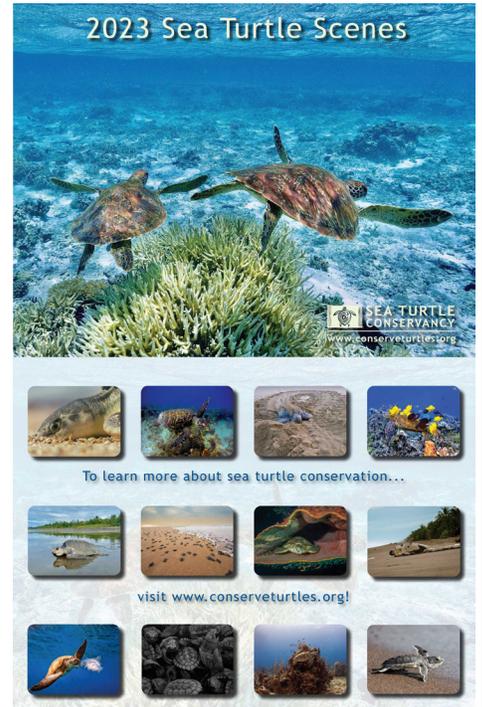
A big thank you to our turtle sponsors for helping make this event possible: Fahlo, Disney's Conservation Fund, Disney Cruise Line, Four Seasons Resort Nevis, Cinder + Salt, Anna Maria Island Turtle Watch, Coastal Wildlife Club, Sea Life Aquariums, Sea Life Trust, Gideon's Bakehouse, Atlantis, Turtle, Florida Leatherbacks, Inc., The Turtle Hospital, Shark Reef, Certina, Gimme Snacks, Howard and Susan Zemser, Graft Cider, and Supercell. 🐢

# Holiday Gift Guide

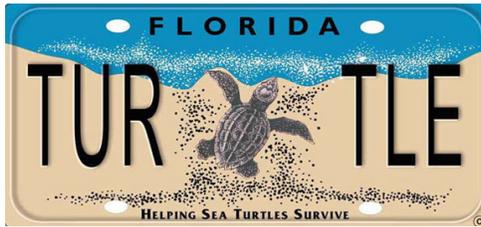
A.



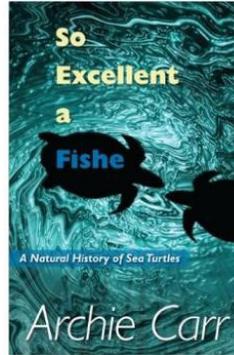
B.



C.



D.



E.



F.



A. 2023 Holiday Ornament - Engraved with the year 2023 on the back. **\$9.95**

B. 2024 Sea Turtle Scenes Calendar - 11" x 17" (open) wall calendar features some of STC's favorite sea turtle scenes taken by talented photographers from around the world. **\$14.95**

C. 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**

D. *So Excellent a Fish: A Natural History of Sea Turtles* - By Dr. Archie Carr with foreword by Karen Bjorndal, director of the Archie Carr Center for Sea Turtle Research. **\$19.95**

E. 2023 Tour de Turtles Shirt - Heather Prism Blue. Also available in Heather Prism Ice Blue. Adult Sizes. 90% lightweight cotton, 10% polyester. **\$24.95**

F. White Compass Sea Turtle Shirt - Shirt by Tortuga Moon, features STC's logo on the front. Seafoam Sport-Tek Pro Tee adult sizes S - XXL. 100% polyester with PosiCharge technology, UPF Rating of 50. **\$24.95**

Visit [conserveturtles.org/shop](https://www.conserveturtles.org/shop) to shop for these items and other great turtle gear!

G.



H.



I.



J.



K.



L.



**G. Loggerhead Hatchling Baseball Cap** - Eco Headwear soft baseball cap with adjustable cloth strap. Loggerhead hatchling embroidered on the front and “Sea Turtle Conservancy” on the back. **\$24.95**

**H. Tour de Turtles Virtual Run Race Shirt**- Shirt by Tortuga Moon, features STC’s logo on the sleeve. Available in Coral and comes in adult sizes S - XL. 100% polyester Sport-Tek activewear **\$19.95**

**I. STC Reusable Bamboo Straw** - STC laser engraved logo on a reusable eco-friendly bamboo straw, comes with a cleaning brush and screen printed cotton pouch. Straw measures approx 7.87” L **\$9.95**

**J. Sea Turtle Notecards** - Loggerhead, Kemp’s Ridley, Leatherback & Hawksbill turtles on the front. Includes eight assorted cards and envelopes. Cards measure 3.5” X 5”. **\$14.95**

**K. Sea Turtle Mask** -Washable and Reusable Personal Masks with Elastic Ear Loops and Filter Pocket  
Adult size - 7¼” x 3¾” folded; 7¼” x 6¾” unfolded **\$9.99**

**L. Wood Bead Sea Turtle Bracelets** -Stylish sea turtle bracelet by Tortuga Moon. The bracelet has an adjustable sliding knot and comes in a green turtle with white bead or a white turtle with green bead. **\$9.95**

Visit [conserveturtles.org/shop](https://conserveturtles.org/shop) to shop for these items and other great turtle gear!



4581 NW 6th Street, Suite A  
Gainesville, FL 32609  
(352) 373-6441  
Fax: (352) 375-2449  
stc@conserveturtles.org  
www.conserveturtles.org

NON-PROFIT ORG  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
JACKSONVILLE, FL  
PERMIT NO. 1111



Printed with vegetable based inks on recycled paper that is PCF and ECF.



## *Turtle Adoptions Make a Great Holiday Gift!*

Give the gift of sea turtle survival this holiday season! Sea turtle adoptions make a great, green holiday gift idea for the people in your life that want to make a positive impact on our world.

With your tax-deductible donation of \$56 or more, you are making a direct difference in the lives of sea turtles! Sea Turtle Conservancy will send gift recipients a special folder with a personalized adoption certificate, Sea Turtle Conservation Guide, window cling, sea turtle sticker, bookmark, hatchling magnet, one-year subscription to STC's newsletter, and a gift of your choice (turtle plushie, ornament or calendar). Please order by **Dec. 12, 2023** for delivery by Christmas.



*To adopt a turtle, visit [conserveturtles.org/adopt-a-turtle](https://www.conserveturtles.org/adopt-a-turtle)*