

In Memoriam

In recent years, a number of beloved members of our global community have passed away, including those memorialized here and many more whose legacies remain in the communities they served. SWOT is grateful to all the sea turtle researchers, conservationists, and enthusiasts who are no longer with us, and we recognize all those people—past and present—who dedicate their lives to helping ensure that future generations can experience and enjoy abundant sea turtles in healthy oceans.



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Satish Bhaskar (1946–2023)

A legendary sea turtle pioneer, Satish Bhaskar surveyed most of India's coast, the shores of West Papua (Indonesia), and nearly all the beaches of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. His sojourns in the late 1970s provided the first information about sea turtles in that remote archipelago. Among many epic tales of Satish's career was a 1982 stint monitoring greens on the uninhabited island of Suheli Valiyakara in the Lakshadweep Islands, India, from which he corresponded with his wife—successfully—via messages sent afloat in a bottle. He presented a landmark paper at the World Conference on the Biology and Conservation of Sea Turtles in 1979, which was a historic event in the history of sea turtle biology. Satish inspired a generation of researchers and conservationists and set unmatched examples of tireless, passionate effort to fill knowledge gaps in sea turtle status. He received the International Sea Turtle Society (ISTS) Sea Turtle Champions Award in 2010 in recognition of his lifetime of iconic work.



Catherine McClellan (1970–2022)

Raised by the Mississippi River, Catherine became an international conservationist after studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, followed by graduate degrees in marine ecology from Duke University and a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Exeter in Cornwall, England. She had a passion for animals, and she centered her studies on marine megafauna, from blackfish to basking sharks, but especially sea turtles. Her work focused on fisheries bycatch, migratory connectivity, behavior, and conservation. She loved the outdoors and felt blessed to have explored many amazing places during her life, but she was especially touched by the coastal region and people of Gabon, where she conducted fieldwork with the largest leatherback sea turtle population in the world. She spoke French and worked elsewhere in francophone Africa also. In addition, she worked in the Americas (South Carolina), the United Kingdom (English Channel), and beyond. She strove for excellence in her research and loved her family, friends, and animals tenaciously.



Chuck Schaffer (1956–2021)

Chuck was one of those rare people who bridged the oddly large gap that exists between the sea turtle community and the freshwater turtle and tortoise community. A regular attendee at the annual Sea Turtle Symposium, he coordinated a special freshwater turtle and tortoise session for many years that attracted terrestrial chelonian experts from many countries and piqued the curiosity of experts from both worlds. He was an accomplished writer and served as editor of the IUCN's *Turtle and Tortoise Newsletter* for several years; he loved and collected antiquarian books and (mostly turtle-themed) memorabilia; and his memory of every meeting he attended, every country he visited, and every turtle he had seen in the field was truly astounding. He not only adored turtles but also cared about conserving them. His smile, lively spirit, jovial and outgoing personality, love of travel and nature, and commitment to family and friends will be deeply missed.



Gail Schofield (1975–2023)

A highly published marine biologist concerned with ocean megafauna conservation, Gail passionately pursued research about loggerhead behavior and conservation as a volunteer at ARCHELON's conservation project in Laganas Bay, Zakynthos, Greece, and ultimately through her job at Queen Mary University of London (UK), where she gained the respect and admiration of coworkers, students, and all who knew her. Gail was a role model who taught and mentored with strength and kindness. She encouraged students to reach their highest potential and cultivated their passion for conservation. She was a full-time sea turtle fanatic and spent countless weeks tracking and observing turtles on the beaches of Zakynthos and elsewhere while sharing her enthusiasm with her son, who loved the exhibits at the Natural History Museum in London. Her tireless efforts to raise awareness about the importance of protecting sea turtles drove countless others to take up the cause. A colleague, mother, mentor, and friend, Gail remains an inspiration to all those who knew her.



Eleanor Sterling (1960–2023)

Eleanor Sterling began her career studying lemurs in Madagascar and came to sea turtles later. However, she spent her entire professional life honoring the interconnectedness of nature and people among indigenous peoples and local communities around the world. She led the American Museum of Natural History as scientist and director across two decades while growing the Center for Biodiversity and Conservation. She later became the director of the Hawai'i Institute of Marine Biology at the University of Hawai'i–Mānoa, where she remained until her untimely death. In all areas of her work, Eleanor centered her efforts on equity, inclusion, and diversity. Those who attended the Sea Turtle Symposium in Goa (2010) will recall Eleanor's compassion and kindness in assisting fellow conservationist Lily Venizelos after Lily suffered a serious injury. Eleanor received the IUCN's prestigious Fred Packard Award in recognition of more than 30 years of advancing just and effective conservation and for her extraordinary lifetime contributions to conservation.



Nancy Wotkyns (1942–2023)

An activist and sea turtle enthusiast who traveled with Oceanic Society for more than two decades, Nancy, with her love of and dedication to supporting local communities, has left a lasting mark in Suriname, Mexico, and elsewhere. She managed a mobile home park in rural Michigan (U.S.A.) and was a no-nonsense, fiercely independent individual who loved connecting with nature and exploring the remote corners of the world. When she volunteered on the leatherback beaches in Suriname, she was the first to hit the beach at dusk and the last one off at dawn. Her boundless enthusiasm was infectious. Nancy made deep and personal connections with the local communities in the places she visited, never failing to bring multiple suitcases of gifts and essential items to leave behind and with only a tiny carry-on for herself. As we mourn her loss, we are also filled with gratitude for her generous spirit and the posthumous gift she made in support of SWOT.