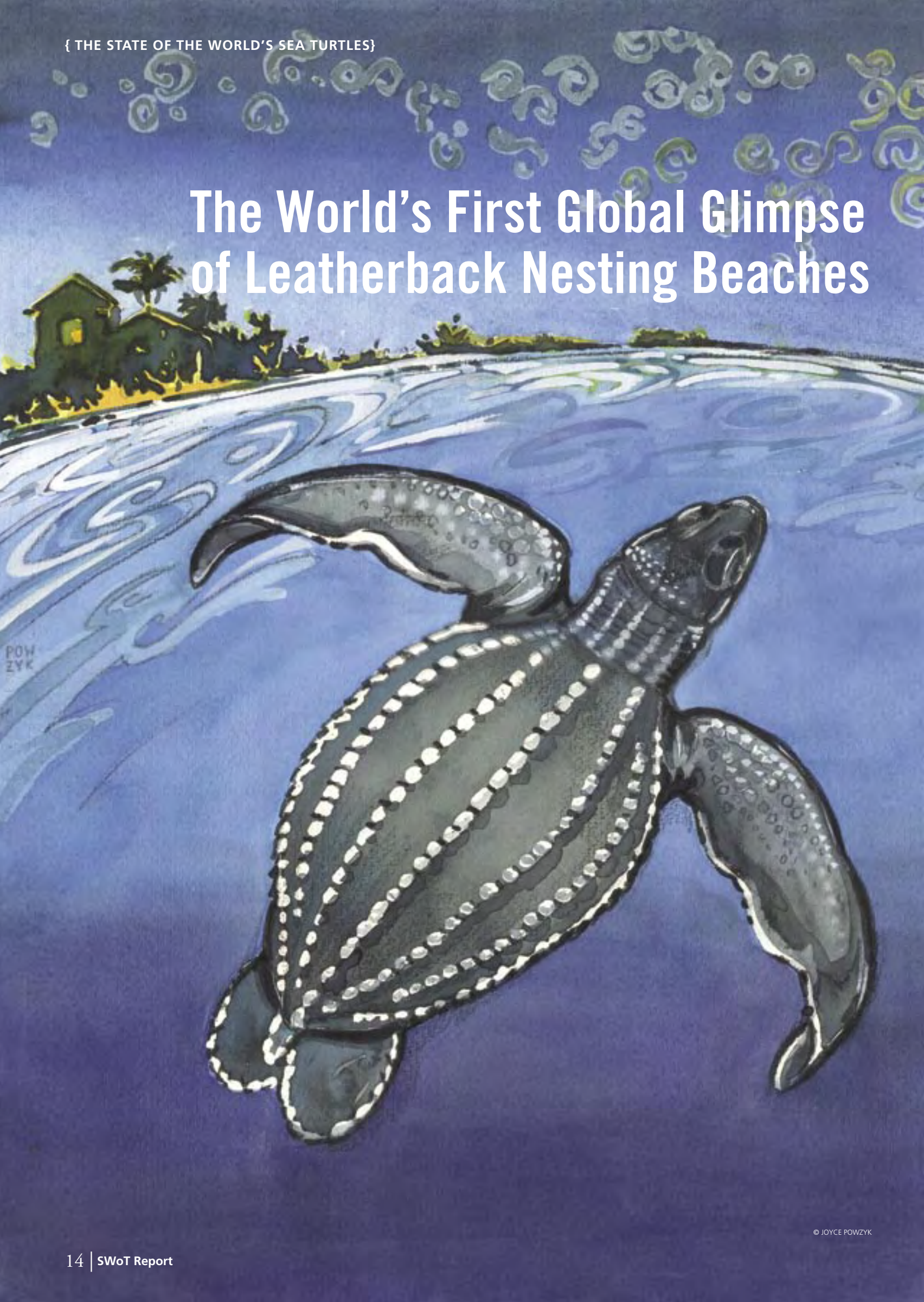


# The World's First Global Glimpse of Leatherback Nesting Beaches





Leatherback hatchlings head to sea. © SUZANNE LIVINGSTONE / UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Every night, come rain or a shining moon, hundreds of field biologists, conservationists, and volunteers around the world don their flashlights and head to the beach, pacing the shoreline all night long to document the lives of sea turtles and to protect their nests and nesting habitats. Separated by thousands of miles and often living in remote areas, speaking different languages and facing unique challenges, the people involved in these projects are worlds away from one another. Yet all share a common vision: a world with healthy oceans and coasts in which sea turtles continue to live and to thrive. And now they have come together in the State of the World's Sea Turtles (SWoT) initiative, calling themselves the "SWoT Team," and taking a collective step forward to make that vision a reality.

Over the past two years, researchers around the world have contributed their time, energy, and scientific data to SWoT, in an effort to map the leatherback nesting beaches of the world with the best available information from the last complete nesting season in 2004—results of which are displayed on the maps on pages 18–19, and in the citations at the end of this publication.

Our modern age is one of information and technology in which traditional barriers to information access have all but disappeared. Hundreds of satellites orbit the earth, relaying and collecting information. A researcher on the Amazon River sends emails to colleagues in Tokyo on a handheld cellular phone. Remote rovers explore the surface of Mars and instantly send data back home. Nevertheless, the biological data necessary for effective conservation planning often remain scattered and inaccessible. Slowly, this is changing.

In the case of sea turtles, a plethora of useful data exist at the local, national, and in some cases regional level; yet previously there have been no up-to-date global-scale presentations of these data. This has been an enormous disadvantage for conservation planners, government bodies, and the sea turtle conservation movement itself, as we

attempt to seek direction for our actions in the context of the big picture. On a global level, there is an urgent need to know the status of all sea turtles—all populations and all life stages—so that we can effectively prioritize our actions.

The truth is that no matter what we do, we cannot protect every sea turtle, every nesting beach, every foraging ground, or every migratory pathway. So as we seek to prevent extinctions, where do we invest our time and money for greatest impact?

Global data such as that presented by SWoT in the first worldwide mapping of leatherback sea turtle nesting data on pages 18–19, will help us to set our global priorities and to answer that question thoroughly and thoughtfully.

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