



Editor's Note

On Measuring Success and the Search for Useful Trends

Ten years ago, SWOT, the State of the World's Sea Turtles Program, was launched in an attempt to point our movement toward its highest priority actions and, more important, to measure whether we were getting the job done. Were we succeeding at sea turtle conservation? We wanted better answers to some of the most basic questions about sea turtles: How many are there? Where are they? Are their numbers changing? Why? What are the most significant threats and the best ways to confront them?

Great work had been done since the 1950s at local and regional scales, but to definitively answer our questions about priorities and trends, we needed to look at the *global* scale using the best available tools of the day—geographic information systems, worldwide connectivity, and relational databases. A passionate international SWOT team network began to grow and to donate its hard-earned data to this common purpose. Together, we produced the first comprehensive, up-to-date global nesting maps for all sea turtles (see *SWOT Report, Vols. I–VI*). We have since developed guidelines (Minimum Data Standards for Nesting Beach Monitoring) to ensure that our data collection efforts are both efficient and fruitful, and we have expanded well beyond nesting beaches to compile genetic information and, more recently, satellite telemetry data. The SWOT database has been used to advance sea turtle research and conservation in many ways, from connecting researchers across borders or ocean basins, to defining subpopulations (regional management units), to predicting the impacts of climate change on nesting distribution.

Yet the question remains: Are we getting the job done? Or, as Wallace J. Nichols asks in our Special Feature (pp. 6–9), Are we winning? A decade of effort has taught the SWOT community that success in conservation is an elusive goal. It is not easily measured by simple metrics and is simultaneously undermined by lumbering threats like climate change and ocean acidification and by surprise affronts such as the Gulf of Mexico oil spill and the 2008 financial crisis. Furthermore, seeing trends in the nearly geological time scale of sea turtle evolution requires patience.

That said, progress is being made both in measuring our movement's success and in defining and understanding the trends that can influence it. This volume of *SWOT Report* is devoted to exploring some of those trends. We hope that the articles herein offer you food for thought about what to keep an eye on and where to head next as we seek to conserve the world's sea turtles and their ocean home.

Thanks for being part of the SWOT team as it winds down its inaugural decade and powers into the next.



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