

# Octava Reunión Anual del Grupo Tortuguero

## Red para la Conservación de Tortugas Marinas \* Sea Turtle Conservation Network

### ¡Celebrando un Tesoro Nacional!

*"A network is non-hierarchical. It is a web of connections among equals. What holds it together is not force, obligation, material incentive, or social contract, but rather shared values and the understanding that some tasks can be accomplished together that could never be accomplished separately. One of the important purposes of a network is simply to remind its members that they are not alone."*  
-from "Beyond the Limits", by Meadows, Meadows, and Randers (1992)

The 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Grupo Tortuguero was held January 27-29, 2006 in Loreto, Baja California Sur, Mexico. The theme of this year's meeting- Celebrando un Tesoro Nacional- reflects the important role sea turtles play in the history, culture, traditions and lives of people throughout Mexico and the world. This meeting has grown from a small gathering of 45 peninsula residents who wanted to save sea turtles in 1999, to the region's premiere grassroots conservation meeting.

#### **History of the Meeting**

Five species of sea turtle inhabit the Eastern Pacific; all are endangered (IUCN Red List, 2000) and four are ecologically extinct. Sea turtle mortality is due to direct capture by poachers who sell turtle meat and eggs on the black market and by incidental capture in fishing nets, trawls, and on longlines. While publications on sea turtle ecology, health and genetics are expanding, until recently there were few on-the-ground projects addressing the main threats to turtle survival. The Grupo Tortuguero was formed to fill this void and recover Eastern Pacific sea turtle populations. It is a network of individuals, communities, organizations, and institutions from around the world dedicated to sea turtle conservation. Due to the efforts of the Grupo Tortuguero and all of its members, a growing number of successful conservation projects have been initiated throughout the peninsula and Mexico aimed at understanding sea turtles and the threats to them, as well as saving these endangered animals.

Each year the Grupo Tortuguero holds a meeting in Baja California Sur, Mexico for all members as well as researchers, international partners and conservationists. The purpose of the meeting is to foster collaborative efforts between community members, enforcement officers, researchers, policy makers and regional conservation organizations and, ultimately, to fulfill the mission of the Grupo Tortuguero. Participants share data and ideas, develop regional strategies, and learn leadership skills. Members present results of research and monitoring projects, and attend training workshops. Most importantly, conservation strategies are debated and developed, and critical personal relationships are formed and renewed. This meeting is a key factor in the success of the Grupo Tortuguero network, the relationships developed and the lessons learned are critical for the members and their projects throughout the region.

#### **Focus on Community**

The 8<sup>th</sup> annual meeting was held in the historic center of Loreto, utilizing local hotels, restaurants and open spaces. It was our goal to foster economic activity within the community of Loreto, as well as give participants an opportunity to get to know and understand the beauty and history of Loreto. The central location of the meeting, as well as the use of local businesses, added to the grassroots feel of the meeting and highlighted the importance of community in conservation.

Almost 300 people registered for this year's meeting, and many attendees brought family members and friends, taking our total number of participants to close to 350- a new high for the annual meeting! Participants came from all over the Baja California peninsula, mainland Mexico and the U.S., and

represented communities, grassroots and international organizations, government agencies, businesses, museums and cultural societies, and universities and research institutions. This unique blend of people is what sets this meeting apart; it is truly a blend of individuals, all bound through their dedication to bring sea turtle populations back from the brink of extinction.

The focus of the Grupo Tortuguero is at the community level, through the participation of communities in sea turtle conservation and the expansion of this network to new communities throughout the region. The annual meeting centers on the participation of community members and each year we strive to involve more communities and more people. Over 40 communities from Mexico and the U.S. were represented at this year's meeting, including new members from Chiapas, Veracruz and other sites throughout mainland Mexico.

### ***The Orantes Prize: Celebrating Loreto***

Every year a community is chosen to receive the Don Manuel Orantes Conservation Award, named after one of the pioneers of sea turtle conservation on the peninsula, recognizing individuals and communities for their outstanding conservation work. This year the award was presented to the community of Loreto, host of the Annual Meeting of the Grupo Tortuguero. Without their tremendous efforts throughout the last eight years, the annual meeting would not be what it is today- the region's premiere grassroots conservation meeting.

### ***Greening the Grupo Tortuguero***

In our effort to truly be the region's premiere conservation meeting, we set up recycling stations throughout the meeting venue and close to 100% of the waste from the meeting was able to be recycled or reused. Plastic, paper, Styrofoam, glass, cans, food- it was all sorted and sent away to be recycled or used in compost after the meeting. Many thanks to Cecilia Fischer and the Loreto Bay Company for making this possible!

### ***2<sup>do</sup> Encuentro para Jovenes y Niños***

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the Youth of the Californias for the Conservation of Sea Turtles took place concurrent with the Grupo Tortuguero meeting. The event was organized by the Grupo Tortuguero, Pro Peninsula, Grupo Ecologista Antares, and the H. IX Ayuntamiento, BCS, working through the Sea Turtle Protection Program, who was in charge of developing the program under the direction of Biologist Graciela Tiburcio and Sergio Román García, with the help of the education department of the Mazatlan Aquarium.

Through the specially designed classroom activities and workshops, the central goal was for participants to come out of the meeting enabled to: 1) Understand the urgency of participating in sea turtle and environmental conservation campaigns; 2) Develop new habits and behaviors regarding the environment, contributing to the conservation of natural resources; and 3) Obtain the knowledge and tools necessary to develop projects that can be carried out in their schools and communities. Approximately 70 children from 13 different communities throughout the Baja California peninsula and the United States participated in this year's youth meeting.

The prestigious Carolina Anderson Award was given to the community of Bahía de Los Angeles in recognition of their efforts towards marine turtle conservation. The youth group JABA (Jovenes Ambientalistas de Bahía de Los Angeles [Young Environmentalists of Bahia de Los Angeles]) received the award, having performed the puppet theatrical production TORTUGOPOLIS, which reflects the problems behind sea turtle consumption and possible solutions. The Carolina Anderson Award was instituted as a tribute to Mrs. Anderson, who dedicated the final years of her life to protecting Baja California's sea turtles; it also recognizes the many foreign citizens who work and donate resources to conservation in Mexico, and especially in Baja California.

### ***Sponsors and Volunteers***

This year's meeting would not have been possible without the support of our sponsors and the tireless efforts of our volunteers- we thank you!

#### *Sponsors and Volunteers:*

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