



Yellow tangs clean a green turtle near Puako, Hawaii. © MICHAEL CAREY / TURTLEPHOTOGRAPHER@YAHOO.COM

# SWOT

## The State of the World's Sea Turtles

A global challenge. A global network. A global solution.

# Foreword

A suburban TV room, 1977. My sisters and I were flopped on the floor, watching something astonishing: hundreds of freshly hatched sea turtles, scrambling across the sand toward their new home in the waves.

Stirring music swelled, a la “Born Free.” Then, a shock. Something swooped down and made off with one of the babies! It was a horrible, filthy seagull! “Hey!” we yelled.

The next shot showed dozens of marauding gulls, dive-bombing the helpless babies and carrying them off for lunch.

We were beside ourselves, shouting at the television, “Leave them alone, you stupid birds!”

I wanted to crash through the screen and punch those birds in their stupid, greedy beaks. Sure, I’d seen nature shows with lions pouncing on zebras or praying mantises eating their husbands, but this was truly monstrous. How could any animal be so black-hearted as to gobble up tiny newborn turtles?

Thirty years later, I know those seagulls weren’t evil; they were just playing their role in the ecosystem. And birds aren’t the sea turtles’ biggest headache—we are. We ransack the marine environment for seafood, smother ancient beaches with condos, and dump enough chemicals in the ocean to kill a tugboat. In short, we’re at war with Neptune himself, and we might just end up with tridents in our behinds. Metaphorically, that is.

The turtles can’t write to the government for help. They can’t rally in the streets, banging pots and pans. All they can do, as their numbers dwindle, is stick to business, paddling the globe on their mysterious rounds.

These improbable seafarers have managed to hang on for 110 million years. They’ve survived ice ages, huge comets slamming into the earth, even the horror of Y2K. If the last loggerhead or leatherback goes extinct on our watch, it will be worse than tragic. It will be lame.

That’s why I’m thrilled that the sea turtles have a new armada of guardians. The SWOT Team comprises hundreds of people around the world who are captivated by these elegant creatures and simply refuse to let them disappear.

Our task is challenging, but manageable. We’re focused on seven species. And they can all bounce back from disaster with our ingenuity and teamwork.

So please check out the articles inside. At least look at the pictures. If a deeply alienated weirdo like me can believe in this mission, maybe you can too.



George Meyer

*George Meyer is a longtime writer for “The Simpsons.” He lives in Los Angeles, California, U.S.A.*

