

VELADOR

Protecting Sea Turtles and their Habitats since 1959

Issue 4, 2004

Hurricanes Wash Out 2004 Nesting Season and Expose Weaknesses in Florida's Coastal Management Policies



David Godfrey

NOAA Satellite Image

In the weeks and months following the unprecedented quadruple-strike of hurricanes in Florida, the Caribbean Conservation Corporation has been working overtime to assess and minimize the long-term impacts of the storms on sea turtle survival. Unfortunately, the news so far has been very concerning. Nearly 90% of all sea turtle nesting in the continental U.S. takes

place in Florida, with most of it concentrated on the Central East Coast. This is exactly where hurricanes Frances and Jeanne came ashore, and they hit right in the middle of nesting season. Meanwhile, hurricanes Charley and Ivan impacted nesting beaches along Florida's West Coast and the Panhandle, respectively.

continued on page 3



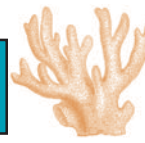
Tortuguero
Update
2



Chiriquí Beach
Project Update
5



Holiday Shopping
Catalogue
6 & 7



In Caribbean cultures, *Velador* translates as "one who stands vigil" — originally referring to turtle and egg harvesters who waited at night for turtles to come ashore. Now CCC claims this title for its newsletter, and around the Caribbean, CCC's researchers and volunteers are replacing poachers as the new veladors.

Velador is published for members and supporters of the nonprofit **Caribbean Conservation Corporation (CCC)** and its **Sea Turtle Survival League (STSL)** program.

CCC is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the conservation of sea turtles through research, training, advocacy, education and the protection of habitats.

STSL is the US-based public awareness, advocacy and education program of the CCC.

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Vets help CCC protect sea turtle eggs & hatchlings

In many communities throughout the world, dog overpopulation is a serious problem, and Tortuguero, Costa Rica, is no exception. What makes this overpopulation especially concerning are the impacts it has on one of the most important sea turtle populations in the world—from destruction of nests to predation of hatchlings.

Through the combined efforts of Caribbean Conservation Corporation, Humane Society International, Humane Society of the United States, its veterinary program (Rural Area Veterinary Services) and many local volunteers, a veterinary clinic and community outreach effort was organized to address the problem of overpopulation and raise awareness about animal welfare issues.

Previous efforts by the Costa Rican government and local citizens to control the numbers of stray dogs have included poisoning programs to reduce the population just prior to sea turtle nesting season. These efforts, which have not been endorsed by CCC, have proven ineffective. The program developed in partnership between CCC and various arms of the Humane Society focused on professional sterilization and animal care as humane methods of controlling dog numbers in the sensitive environment of Tortuguero. The program, which was conducted in September, 2004, also included public education and training designed to improve the lives of local companion animals, while protecting Tortuguero's fragile turtle populations.

Dr. Emma Harrison, CCC Field Research Coordinator, participated in

the clinic with Dr. Susan Monger, Latin American Director of RAVS, and Jennifer Felt, Deputy Director of Trade Capacity Building for HSI. Volunteer veterinarians from the U.S. teamed up with a volunteer veterinarian from Costa Rica and countless community members to safely conduct over fifty surgeries—mostly female dog spays.

During the course of the clinic, which was held in a covered, public recreation facility in the middle of Tortuguero village, many locals and tourists assembled to watch and ask questions. On the first morning of the clinic, a handful of community members gathered at the makeshift operating facility as the first dog was being prepared for surgery. Several observers questioned the need for animal control in Tortuguero. In an amazing coincidence,



A dog eating live sea turtle hatchlings is an all too common scene in Tortuguero.

at that very instant the dog being prepped for sterilization regurgitated a freshly eaten sea turtle hatchling. After this incident, public support for the clinic was very strong. Many people ended up bringing in their pets for surgery who were initially reluctant to have the procedure done on their animals. Plans are already underway for a follow up clinic next spring, when participation is expected to

be even higher as a result of the success of this year's veterinary clinic.

Due to its small size and isolation, Tortuguero is an ideal community in which to begin such a campaign. Humane population reduction through sterilization and increased awareness about the importance of animal care, will benefit not only the dog population, but also the sea turtles upon which the community of Tortuguero relies as a source of employment and economic stability.

By Susan Monger, DVM
RAVS Veterinarian

from cover...

One of the hardest hit areas was the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge. Named after CCC's founding scientific director, this 20-mile stretch of coastline is the most important nesting site for green turtles and loggerheads in the U.S. While we will never know exactly how many eggs and hatchlings were lost, one estimate suggests over half of the entire season's nests in Florida were washed away by the hurricanes. That amounts to millions of eggs! This represents a tremendous loss, but sea turtles, just like Florida's beaches, have weathered hurricanes for millennia. Over time, natural beaches would recover to a healthy profile and nesting would return to normal. However, Florida's coastline is no longer in its natural state. Throughout the peninsula, turtle nesting beaches have been built upon extensively, and they are being altered by inlets, jetties, sea walls and repetitive sand pumping projects.

The long-term threat to sea turtles resulting from these storms will be determined by the way humans respond to protect coastal property. Right now scores of beachfront residents are hurrying to get permits to build sea walls or other experimental structures that pose a direct risk to sea turtles. There is no doubt that sea walls increase erosion on the adjacent beach, ultimately creating the need for more sea walls. Numerous examples of increased erosion in front of and to the sides of sea walls can be seen in the wake of the recent storms. A textbook example is the extreme erosion around the Wabasso seawall in Indian River County. In the mid-90s, CCC filed suit to stop construction of this and similar walls in Florida. Not only did the presence of this massive vertical wall greatly increase erosion on adjacent public property, the wall failed to safeguard many of the homes it was designed to protect.

Numerous coastal municipalities are also planning to rapidly dump sand on their beaches. While sand nourishment is almost always preferable to hard armoring, if not regulated closely, even these activities can add to the one-time loss of nests caused by the storms. The beach armoring and sand-dumping occurring now and over the next year could forever alter and degrade some of the most important sea turtle nesting beaches on Earth.

Perhaps never before have the weaknesses in Florida's coastal policies been more evident. Even as coastal residents are picking through the remnants of their hurricane-ravaged homes and government officials are adding up the high costs of vanished sand nourishment projects, some government agencies are discussing

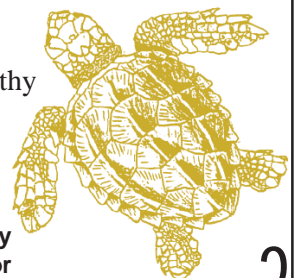


Over 50 feet of accelerated dune recession around the southern "return wall" of the Wabasso seawall, just south of the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge. Note the complete loss of two of the homes this wall was built to protect.

- streamlining procedures for rebuilding on the beachfront.
- In the process, sea turtles are being squeezed into oblivion and the natural shoreline is disappearing in front of us.

To limit the potential long-term impacts, CCC is in constant contact with local, state and federal regulators, and we are providing strong recommendations to avoid the use of armoring on the coast. CCC is also advocating the landward relocation of structures that were condemned or destroyed by the storms and are now sitting on the edge of the frontal dune. CCC staff members are also meeting with the heads of Florida's regulatory agencies to discourage policies that permit new construction on eroding shorelines. In short, we are advancing the notion that it is in all our interests, including sea turtles, to challenge short-sighted approaches to coastal management and to stimulate discussions about more environmentally and economically sound options.

The impacts of Hurricanes Charley, Frances, Ivan and Jeanne to Florida's beach and dune environment raise the issue of whether local, state and federal agencies need to reevaluate their coastal management policies. Should rampant development of homes and high-rises on critically eroding shorelines be allowed to continue? Are new laws and financial incentives needed to encourage the landward relocation of heavily damaged and vulnerable coastal properties? CCC believes a major updating of coastal management policies is in order to ensure a healthy beach and dune environment for both sea turtles and people well into the future. 🐢



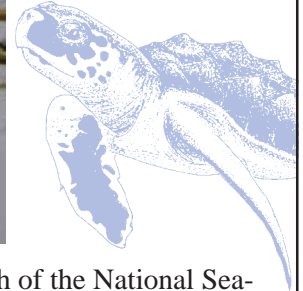
By David Godfrey
CCC Executive Director

Kemp's Ridley Update

National Park Service File Photo



A Kemp's ridley sea turtle returns to the Gulf of Mexico after laying a clutch of eggs in North Padre Island, Texas, just outside the Padre Island National Seashore.



The critically endangered Kemp's ridley sea turtle has passed another milestone this summer on its perilous journey back from the brink of extinction. In August 2004, the U.S. National Park Service released 349 of the endangered turtles from Padre Island National Seashore, Texas, into the Gulf of Mexico. This was the largest such release in a 25-year cooperative project with Mexico to save this smallest of the sea turtles species from extinction.

In the 1970s the number of nesting Kemp's ridley females was reduced by human and animal poaching, and drowning in shrimp fishing nets, to fewer than 500 on the lone, remote, Mexican nesting beach at Rancho Nuevo. An international conservation effort strongly supported by Dr. Archie Carr and the CCC focused on mandating the use of TEDs, or Turtle Excluder Devices, on U.S. and Mexican shrimp boats, combined with the long-term protection of the nesting beach. As a result of these effective efforts, nesting at Rancho Nuevo has been steadily increasing. This year over 7,100 Kemp's ridley nests were deposited, showing the effectiveness of this long-term conservation program.

In a still-controversial effort to recover the species, a cooperative Mexican and U.S. government project was initiated that transferred thousands of eggs to Padre Island National Seashore to be hatched and later released from the beach. This year, a record 41 Kemp's ridley nests were laid on Texas beaches. Over half the nests were within the National Seashore. Other nesting sites included Bolivar Peninsula, Galveston Island, Surfside in Brazoria County, Mustang Island, sections of Padre Island both north and south of the National Seashore, and Boca Chica Beach. One turtle came ashore directly in front of a seawall at the North Padre Island Holiday Inn, quickly drawing a crowd. The turtle's 85 eggs would have been washed over and destroyed by the high tide, but the eggs were removed to a National Park Service hatchery. Relocating eggs from all sea turtle nests in Texas to a

hatchery, except those found south of the National Seashore, is part of the Kemp's ridley recovery plan.

"This has been a banner year in this conservation effort," says Donna Shaver, the National Park Service scientist who has been overseeing the project which she helped start 24 years ago when she came to the Park as a college student volunteer.

Six of this year's nesting turtles were originally hatched at Padre Island after having been transported from Mexico, showing that at least some of the thousands of relocated eggs eventually produced mature, wild turtles that returned to Texas to nest. Kemp's ridley nests have also been documented along the Gulf Coast of Florida.

Under a still-broiling Texas sun at 6:40 in the evening, a crowd of about 200 onlookers and sea turtle volunteers gathered at the beach in front of the National Seashore's visitor center where the hatchlings were carefully removed from their Styrofoam boxes and laid in a long line on the sand. After a short interval, a few of the most active began their 300-foot crawl to the Gulf surf, as the crowd cheered them on. When the first hatchling finally made it to breakers, the children squealed, and adults and volunteers burst into applause. 🐢

Adapted from a story by CCC Member Andrew Guthrie

Deck Your Halls with Sea Turtles this Holiday Season. Order CCC's Collectible Holiday Ornament. Hurry! Supplies are Limited. Order by phone 800-678-7853 or visit us online at giftshop.cccturtle.org



Chiriquí Beach Update

An All-Too-Common Fate for Hawksbill Sea Turtles

In 2003, the Caribbean Conservation Corporation launched a new project to protect the hawksbill sea turtle nesting population at Chiriquí Beach in the Bocas del Toro Province of Panama (*Velador* Issue 2, 2003). Chiriquí Beach is a remote beach on Panama's Caribbean shore and was once described by Dr. Archie Carr as the most important nesting beach in the Caribbean for hawksbill turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*). However, by the 1980s and 1990s, sporadic aerial and ground surveys suggested that nesting had declined as much as 98% from previous levels. The decline was attributed in large part to the extensive harvest of nesting hawksbills to support the international trade in tortoiseshell.

While the primary focus of CCC's Chiriquí Beach



Merigö begins her final journey being tracked by researchers using satellites.

Project was the initiation of a long-term hawksbill monitoring and protection program, the project also

includes the satellite tracking of post-nesting female hawksbill sea turtles. In 2003, satellite transmitters were attached to two hawksbills. One headed northwest to coral reefs off the coast of Nicaragua, while the other headed northeast to reefs south of Jamaica.

In 2004, one satellite transmitter was attached to a hawksbill named "Merigö." About a hundred local school children came out to watch the release of Merigö, while children all over the world would be able to watch her migration over the Internet. Unfortunately, ten days after Merigö's release, researchers began receiving very high quality location signals and no dive data, both uncommon for sea turtles that spend most of their time underwater. Researchers decided that Merigö was on land and had probably been killed or captured.

The location signals suggested that the transmitter was at Cayo de Agua, located 30 miles north of Chiriquí Beach. Natalia Decastro, a former CCC Research




Over 100 school students line the beach as Merigö makes her way back to the ocean.

Assistant now working with Drs. Anne and Peter Meylan on Zapatilla Cay, Panama, met up with Daniel Castillo from Panama's National Environment Authority to travel to Cayo de Agua in search of Merigö.

They found the remains of Merigö and the transmitter! The hawksbill had been caught and was about to be eaten by an indigenous family living at Cayo de Agua. According to the wife, her husband had caught the turtle while diving at the south eastern end of Cayo de Agua. It was roasting over the fire as Natalia arrived. After much convincing, Natalia managed to recover the transmitter, still sending signals, from the roof of the family's home, where it had been thrown after being removed from Merigö's shell.

"I went the next day to talk with the fisherman about Merigö," said Decastro. "He told me he caught the turtle to use for meat, not for its shell. He said that he was keeping the shell until someone could try to sell it in Cayo de Agua. A situation that doesn't happen very often."

The recovered transmitter was attached to another hawksbill, named "Señorita Chiriquí," on October 7, 2004. Perhaps Señorita Chiriquí will survive long enough to return to Chiriquí Beach in a year or two and once again be observed by beach monitors. You can follow the migration of Señorita Chiriquí at www.cccturtle.org. 



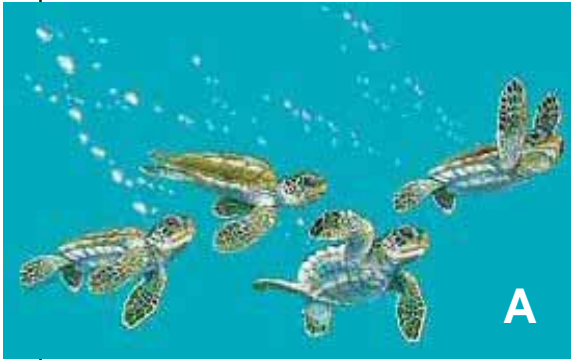
Merigö's carapace. The fisherman is keeping the shell in the hope that someone will buy it. Note the "8" placed on the back of the shell by CCC to easily identify the turtle.



Holiday Shopping Catalogue

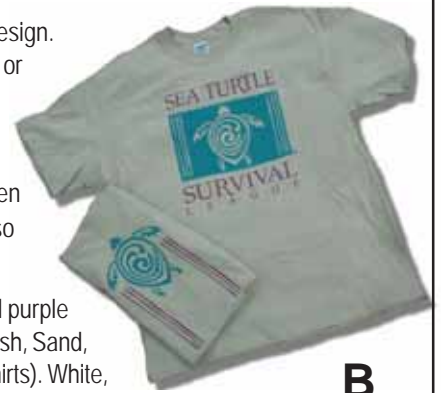


To view images of all CCC's merchandise items visit our online gift shop at <http://giftshop.cccturtle.org>



A

A. "Baby Sea Turtles" - A wonderful & cute design. These cute hatchlings look great on Metro Blue or Caribbean Blue (pictured) cotton T-shirts or Women's Black Scoop Neck. **T-shirts** available in children X-S, S, M & L and adult M, L, XL. **Women's Scoop Neck** available in adult women sizes L and XL **\$19.95** **AM. Ceramic Mug** also available with Caribbean Blue design **\$12.95**



B

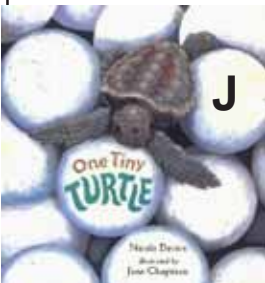
B. Wear your support - Our beautiful teal and purple logo looks great on these colorful shirts. White, Ash, Sand, Iris, Goldenrod or Black (text is white on black shirts). White,

Ash, Iris, Goldenrod and Sand are available in adult S, M, L, XL. Black is available in adult L, XL only. **\$19.95**

C. STSL Baseball Cap - This Sea Turtle Survival League soft baseball cap is a high quality brushed twill, adjustable cloth strap with a sandwich layer brim (white layer between two layers of khaki). Adult size, khaki color only. **\$19.95**

Our selection of books includes four books by Archie Carr, the founding Scientific Director of CCC.

D. *The Windward Road* - Archie colorfully describes his travels to Caribbean beaches in the 1940s and 50s, where he looked for clues in his effort to unravel the mysteries of the enigmatic sea turtle. This book alerted the world to the decline of sea turtle populations, and won several awards. **\$19.95**

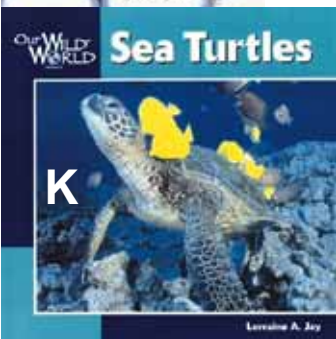


J

E. *High Jungles and Low* - A vivid and passionate discourse of the time Archie spent in Honduras in the 1940s. **\$19.95**

F. *Ulendo--Travels of a Naturalist in and out of Africa* - Archie's passion for the natural world shines through in this brilliant text that continues to inspire naturalists. **\$19.95**

G. *A Naturalist in Florida--A Celebration of Eden* - This volume is a compilation of essays written by Archie and edited after his death by his wife, Marjorie Carr. **\$19.95**



K

H. *Sea Turtles* by Jeff Ripple - This spectacularly illustrated book profiles all the species of sea turtles, including life history, navigation, natural predators, human-caused threats and conservation efforts around the world. Full of crisp, colorful photographs, this book should be on every turtle lover's coffee table! **\$19.95**

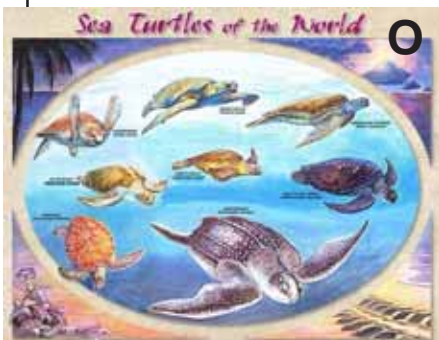
I. *Into the Sea* by Brenda Guiberson - This delightful children's book follows the life cycle of a sea turtle from hatchling to adulthood. Children are sure to enjoy the wonderful illustrations and the moving story of survival. Ages 5-8. **\$18.95**

J. *One Tiny Turtle* by Nicole Davis - The story of the life cycle of a loggerhead sea turtle draws readers into the mysteries of this reclusive deep-sea creature, while the illustrations bring the ocean world to life in all its beauty. Ages 5-8. **\$18.95**



L

K. *Sea Turtles (Our Wild World)* by Lorraine A. Jay - Teaches nature conservation and makes learning about animals fun. A durable softcover with color photos and illustrations. If a child wants to know about sea turtles, this is the book. Ages 8-12. **\$9.95**



O

L. Plush Sea Turtle Toy - This adorable plush sea turtle is a great soft toy or collectible. The perfect gift for children of all ages. 6" in length. **\$6.50**

M. Loggerhead Plush Sea Turtle Toy - A cute, soft plush loggerhead sea turtle from Smithsonian's Sea Turtle Journey series. Measures 12" in length. **\$16.95**

N. Hanging Plush Sea Turtle - A cute, soft plush sea turtle. With Velcro on its flippers, this stuffed toy can hang around your neck or over a door handle, just about anywhere! 17 inches. Available in Brown or Green (Please specify color on order sheet). **\$12.95**

O. *Sea Turtles of the World* - This poster by artist Deirdre Hyde is a new version of her original poster. The "Turtles of the World" poster is a colorful depiction of the species of sea turtles found world wide. **\$11.95**



N

P. Tortuguero Sea Turtle Print - A gorgeous painting by artist Dierdre Hyde featuring the lush colors of Costa Rica. **\$10.95**

**U**

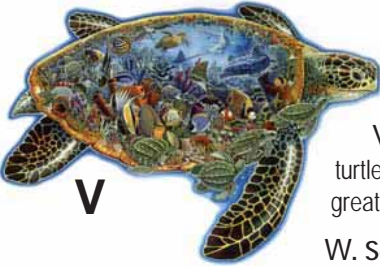
Q. Tale of the Green Turtle - This 27-minute video explores CCC's efforts to save the Caribbean green turtle. **\$14.95**

**T**

Costa Rica. **\$14.95**

S. Sea Turtle License Plate - Want a turtle plate for your car, but don't live in Florida? Get the Sea Turtle Survival League's mock license plate for the front of your car. **\$12.95**

T. Sea Turtle Note Cards - Set of Sea Turtle Species of the World blank note cards. Each box set includes 7 cards, one for each species, with a colorful image on the front and sea turtle facts for that species on the back. Comes in a clear soft fold box and includes envelopes. **\$16.95**

**V**

U. Green Turtle Hatchlings Jigsaw Puzzle - 550 piece jigsaw. Size: 15-1/2" x 18". Not suitable for children under 3 years of age. **\$14.95**

V. Garden of Sea Turtles Shaped Puzzle - 1,000 piece, sea turtle shaped, jigsaw puzzle over 3 feet long. No straight edges--a great puzzle challenge! Recommended for ages 12 - up. **\$19.95**

**X**

W. Sea Turtle Tanga Nut Figurine - Hand carved in Ecuador, providing economic incentives for the sustainable harvest of the tagua palm nut, commonly known as "vegetable ivory." Approximate Dimensions: 2 3/4" high, 3 1/2" long, 3" wide. **\$29.95**

X. CCC Silver Holiday Ornament - You won't find this unique, collectible ornament anywhere else! Our distinctive logo is painted on a beautiful, silver-plated snowflake and features the message "Creating Goodwill and Hope for Sea Turtles" engraved on the back. Quantities are limited, so grab one now before they're gone. **\$7.95**

Y. CCC Logo Key Chain - Our logo keychain features a non-twist connection and a spinning gold-tone replica of our distinctive sea turtle logo. **\$5.75**

Z. Silver Leatherback - Sterling silver leatherback sea turtle jewelry! Created by Wildthings in Massachusetts, this unique leatherback is available as a pendant on an 18" silver chain, a pair of dangle earrings, or on the ends of a bangle bracelet!
Z - pendant & chain: \$24.95 (pictured); Z1 - hoop earrings: \$19.95; Z2 - bangle bracelet: \$30.95 (pictured)

**Z****AA**

AA. Loggerhead Earrings - A sterling silver loggerhead sea turtle. Created by Wildthings, this sea turtle jewelry is available as a pair of dangle earrings. **\$14.95**

BB. Sea Turtle Bracelet - A row of sterling silver green sea turtles. Created by Wildthings, these turtles will wrap around your wrist to form a bracelet. **\$29.95**

**BB****Z2**

*** Additional Items and Images of all CCC's Merchandise Can be Found at <http://giftshop.cccturtle.org>**

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TOTAL						

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Caribbean Conservation Corporation



**Looking for a Holiday Gift that Makes a Difference?
Want Somebody Else to Help Pull the Load?
Adopt-A-Turtle and Let CCC
Take Care of at Least One of Your**

Holiday Gifts, While You Help Ensure a Future for Sea Turtles!

This holiday season, surprise your friends and family with a gift that's both unique and meaningful. By "adopting" an **endangered sea turtle as a gift**, you and your loved ones will take pride in helping ensure the survival of some of the most amazing creatures on the planet.

For a tax-deductible donation of at least \$25 or more (\$35 International), the **Sea Turtle Survival League (STSL)** will provide a personalized full-color adoption certificate, a sea turtle conservation guide, a colorful sticker, magnet, and a one-year subscription to the CCC/STSL newsletter, all in a beautiful color folder.



New for the 2004 Holiday Season! Tailor your gift to each person on your list by choosing from a variety of exciting new gift premiums (while supplies last). Visit CCC's website for pictures of the different premiums.

\$25 adoption level: you will receive our fun Sea Turtle Pen.

\$35 adoption level: choose either a Set of Sea Turtle Miniatures or CCC Notepad Stationery.

\$50 adoption level: choose either our Silver Holiday Ornament or a Small Plush Sea Turtle.

\$100 adoption level: choose either our Logo T-shirt or a Wild Things Hanging Plush Sea Turtle.

STSL's Adopt-A-Turtle program offers the unique opportunity to adopt satellite-tracked turtles. This popular educational program uses satellite technology that allows anyone with computer access to follow their turtle's migratory movements on our website. Please visit our website to view a list of satellite turtles available for adoption.

Proceeds support the oldest and most accomplished sea turtle research and conservation group in the world. CCC conducts ongoing research programs in Costa Rica, Bermuda and Panama; and carries out international education and advocacy programs.

To adopt a sea turtle for yourself, a friend, or a loved one call the **Caribbean Conservation Corporation** at **800-678-7853** or visit our website at www.cccturtle.org.

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