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Editorial Comment

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In this second issue of Volume 3 of *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* and 10th issue overall, we present a special focus issue on the hawksbill turtle, *Eretmochelys imbricata*. The reason for presenting this information at this time derives from the controversies generated regarding implementation of the revised IUCN *Red List* criteria for determining the global survival status and extinction risk of the hawksbill.

The IUCN Species Survival Commission (1994) first adopted and published revised *Red List* criteria in late 1994. A request was then made by the Species Survival Commission for a review, updating, and justification of the status designations of all species using the new revised criteria. This review responsibility fell to the various IUCN/SSC Specialist Groups. The IUCN/SSC Marine Turtle Specialist Group (MTSG) undertook such a review for all sea turtles and, using the revised criteria, changed the extinction risk category of the hawksbill turtle from its previously listed category of Endangered to Critically Endangered. This designation was subsequently published in the revised 1996 *IUCN Red List of Threatened Animals* (Baillie and Groombridge, 1996).

The hawksbill, due primarily to the economic value of its scutes (tortoiseshell or bekko), has historically been subject to intense harvests and trade. Gradually, however, as a result of international trade restrictions imposed by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), such trade diminished, until 1993, when legal international trade finally ceased when Japan relinquished its reservation.

In 1997, at the Tenth Conference of the Parties to CITES, Cuba petitioned for an exception to the restriction on international trade in tortoiseshell through a downlisting of its population of hawksbills (Republic of Cuba, 1997; subsequently published as Republic of Cuba, 1998; and references therein: Carrillo and Contreras, 1998; Carrillo and Moncada, 1998; Carrillo et al., 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 1998d, 1998e; Moncada et al., 1998a, 1998b; Nodarse et al., 1998). At the same Conference, a draft report prepared by the MTSG on *Biology and Status of the Hawksbill in the Caribbean* was presented (Meylan et al., 1997; and references therein: Bass, 1997; Crouse, 1997; Donnelly, 1997; Eckert and Richardson, 1997; Marcovaldi, 1997; Márquez and Eckert, 1997; Meylan, 1997a, 1997b). The Cuban proposal was rejected by CITES and the hawksbill remains illegal in CITES international trade.

The MTSG draft report came under harsh public criticism (Mrosovsky, 1997) for failing to provide adequate documentation and justification of the Critically Endangered status of the hawksbill. Mrosovsky charged that supportive documenta-

tion was being kept secret and unavailable and recommended that the IUCN instead list the hawksbill as Data Deficient, a category implying that enough information was not available to make a determination as to extinction risk for the species.

Several responses to Mrosovsky's (1997) criticism resulted. Brackett (1997), MacKenzie (1997), and Meylan (1998) defended the actions and procedures of the MTSG and IUCN while acknowledging the need to provide more publicly available documentation as justification for the Critically Endangered listing. MacKenzie (1997) charged that Mrosovsky (1997) may have been biased in his views due to his affiliation with commercial interests favoring harvest of wildlife. Lapointe (1997) questioned the MTSG's motives in regard to the Cuban CITES proposal and charged that the MTSG was slow in adopting the concepts and philosophies of sustainable use accepted by other Specialist Groups and IUCN itself.

In early 1998, at the suggestion of Peter Meylan, a member of the editorial board of *Chelonian Conservation and Biology*, the editors of the journal were approached by Anne Meylan and the MTSG with the request that we consider publishing a revised and re-reviewed version of the original MTSG-prepared Caribbean draft report (Meylan et al., 1997; and references therein). We saw this as an opportunity to provide independent outside peer-review of this important document and suggested that the authors of the original document resubmit updated and revised manuscripts. At the same time, the official MTSG justification paper providing a global review of hawksbill populations had been undertaken by Anne Meylan and Marydele Donnelly at the request of the IUCN Species Survival Commission and it was felt that this document should also be considered for inclusion in the volume.

With this nucleus of hawksbill papers as a core, we felt that we had a wonderful opportunity to provide a more global and broadly encompassing review of hawksbill conservation biology by bringing together a diverse set of contributions from around the world. We therefore solicited many additional manuscripts from hawksbill researchers around the world, including several submissions by the Cuban scientists and international consultants who formulated the original Cuban CITES proposal (Republic of Cuba, 1997, 1998; and references therein).

Our proposals met with resounding success and the final product in hand testifies to the broad-based inclusionary policy and response it generated. We have made every attempt to provide an open forum for diverse data and views of hawksbill conservation and biology; those data and views are reflected in the collection of papers presented here.

Each paper has been critically peer-reviewed by both editors and two additional experts in the field. A total of 25 scientific papers are included in the volume. The core group of papers on the status and biology of the hawksbill in the Caribbean prepared by the MTSG comprise 5 contributions (Bjorndal on conservation perceptions, Meylan on status, Crouse on population modeling, Meylan on international movements, and Bass on genetic analysis); this is followed by the official MTSG justification paper (Meylan and Donnelly). An additional 19 papers reflect hawksbill conservation and biology around the world. Of these, 10 papers are from the Caribbean region: van Dam and Diez (tagging methodology), León and Diez (Dominican Republic), Starbird et al. (U.S. Virgin Islands), Richardson et al. and Kerr et al. (Antigua), Moncada et al. and Carrillo et al. (Cuba), Garduño-Andrade and Garduño-Andrade et al. (Mexico), and Díaz-Fernández et al. (Caribbean genetics); and 9 papers are from elsewhere in the world: Marcovaldi et al. and Sanches and Bellini (Brazil), Pilcher (Saudi Arabia), Mortimer and Bresson (Seychelles), Chan and Liew and Pilcher and Ali (Malaysia), Suganuma et al. (Indonesia), Dobbs et al. (Australia), and Okayama et al. (Indo-Pacific genetics). We believe that the papers presented in this special issue on the hawksbill will stand as a classic document recording the current state of our knowledge on the conservation biology of this species.

In conjunction with the publication of this special issue on the hawksbill turtle, the publisher of this journal has established a formal association between *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* and the IUCN/SSC Marine Turtle Specialist Group. We started out as the journal of the IUCN/SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group, but have gradually expanded our role to also provide an outlet for scientific research on marine turtles. By associating ourselves equally with both Specialist Groups we now hope to create a heightened degree of synergy between these groups in their efforts to understand and document the world of chelonian conservation and biology issues. It is our hope and belief that the members of these two often disparate but ultimately similar groups can only benefit from the intrinsic value of the increased interactions and collaboration resulting from this synergy.

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