

Seychelles ‘turtle lady’ recognized for lifelong career in sea turtle conservation

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| By: Sharon Uranie |



Jeanne Mortimer pictured with a nesting Hawksbill turtle. Mortimer has been working with sea turtles in Seychelles since 1981. (Marco Harms)

(Seychelles News Agency) - The Seychelles’ expert on sea turtle **conservation**, **Jeanne Mortimer**, says that to be recognised with a ‘**Lifetime Achievement Award**’ serves as motivation to keep at what she has been doing for decades.

The **International Sea Turtle Society** announced the recognition at its 36th annual symposium on sea turtle biology and **conservation** held in Lima, Peru, between February 29 and March 4, 2016.

“They make the award a surprise, so I did not know in time, I only found out afterwards,” Mortimer said to SNA this week.

“I feel very flattered. I think there’s a lot of people doing good work and there’s a lot of people who could be given that kind of award so I feel pleased and honoured that they picked me,” she added.

The **International Sea Turtle Society** is a not-for-profit organization whose members are dedicated to the research and **conservation** of **sea turtles** around the world.

The **Lifetime Achievement Award**, given out since 2008, is aimed at recognising individuals who have had a significant impact on sea turtle biology and **conservation** through the course of their career.



Mortimer has worked with many Seychellois which she says has allowed her to learn from their knowledge of sea turtles. In the above Photo Mortimer is pictured with Roland Nolin (right) and Antonio Constance better known as Mazarin (left) doing satellite tracking on Cousin island. (George Balazs)

Mortimer, often referred to as ‘**Madam Torti**’ or the **Turtle Lady**, has over 40 years of experience working with sea turtles.

The American-Seychellois biologist who started her career in 1973 in Central America has been working in Seychelles since 1981.

Mortimer says the years she has spent working in the 115-island archipelago in the western Indian Ocean have been filled with interesting moments.

“When I first came it was fascinating to get to know Seychelles. I spent five months in Cosmoledo with a dozen fishermen and they were all killing turtles but I could

learn from them because they knew a lot about turtles and I could also learn Creole,” said Mortimer.

“I think one of the biggest satisfaction is when Seychelles changed the law that made it illegal to kill turtles and really took onboard the importance of **conservation** and the need to protect ecosystems in general,” she added.

The **turtle lady** believes that community monitoring projects that have involved not only foreign scientists but the local population as well are one of the things that has helped the numbers of nesting **sea turtles** rise from the lows of the time of rampant poaching.



The Seychelles **turtle lady** observing Nigel Boniface and Jean-Claude Camille studying hatching success on D'Arros island. Mortimer says that involving the local population in turtle monitoring programmes has proven to be an effective model to prevent poaching. (Rainer von Brandis)

Mortimer is now more involved in freelance work during which she partners with various groups and organisations working to protect **sea turtles** and promote **conservation** efforts particularly with the Island **Conservation** Society.

“We’ve set up a lot of turtle monitoring projects in Seychelles and those kind of keep me busy because I help them to make sure staff are trained and data are collected properly. We can make sense of what they’re finding and we can come up with reports,” she said.

Some of her upcoming plans include to fully develop a not-for-profit organisation called Turtle Action Group of Seychelles (TAGS) she started in 2008 with the aim of bringing all those involved in turtle **conservation** in Seychelles together.

The organisation is currently working on putting up a website with the help of the Environment Trust Fund of Seychelles and Save our Seas Foundation which are providing the funding. Save our Seas Foundation (SOSF), is a not-for-profit organisation with a research station on D'Arros Island.

“Also within the next two years I want to have a national symposium where sites where turtles are being monitored and groups interested in sea turtle education can participate to produce proceedings from that, where each organisation would have their own chapter. But the next step is another book that would be more of interest to the general public,” says Mortimer.



Jeanne Mortimer who is also a fan of giant land tortoises has been involved in sea turtle monitoring in **conservation** for over 40 years and Seychelles is the place she has spent the longest doing so -- for 35 years. (**Jeanne Mortimer**)

While she is proud of the advances in Seychelles', which now has the fourth-highest nesting population of turtles in the world, Mortimer believes the species remain vulnerable.

She is also happy to see initiatives such as an annual sea turtle festival that is helping to generate an interest in the younger generation.

Mortimer, who has made Seychelles her second home, says she does travel to the US to see families and friends almost every year, but feels Seychelles is where she is really doing something worthwhile.

- See more at:

<http://www.seychellesnewsagency.com/articles/5010/Seychelles+turtle+lady+recognized+for+lifelong+career+in+sea+turtle+conservation#sthash.nua5GrBi.dpuf>