

ANNOUNCEMENTS



45TH INTERNATIONAL SEA TURTLE SOCIETY SYMPOSIUM, 2ND TO 8TH APRIL 2027, GQEBERHA (PORT ELIZABETH), NELSON MANDELA BAY, SOUTH AFRICA

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You are invited to join us to relish sea turtle-related conservation science, management debates and cutting-edge research together with people from around the world uniting in one country – South Africa. The symposium will celebrate conservation achievements while looking forward on how to address emerging challenges and opportunities. The theme for the symposium is *From ancient shores to ocean highways: Sea turtles at a crossroads*.

This theme reflects both the location and time in global history. Looking through this window into “deep time”, the theme acknowledges the evolutionary ritual of nesting, dispersal and migration that has unfolded through the eons. At the same time, it acknowledges the immensity of our rapidly changing world, where near-cataclysmic challenges await – climate tipping points, giga-scale coastal transformation and Artificial Intelligence capable of reshaping the status quo.

It is fitting to host this momentous meeting in South Africa. The country has one of the longest histories in conservation with some of the oldest formally recognised protected areas in the world, such as the Kruger National Park and Tsitsikamma Marine Protected Area. More

importantly, South Africa has been a pioneer in sea turtle conservation and monitoring.

Fossilised hatchling tracks from about 100,000 years ago have been discovered not far west of Nelson Mandela Bay, in a completely different marine bioregion from where sea turtles occur today. The oldest known record of sea turtle-human interactions comes from Sibudu Cave, in the Tongati River valley north of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal. These remains date from the late Middle Stone Age, about 50,000 years ago, indicating that early humans interacted with sea turtles.

The “modern history” of sea turtle conservation in South Africa began more than a century ago, when the first legislation protecting sea turtles was introduced in 1916. Five decades later, monitoring started in earnest, and the early conservation officers developed many of the techniques still used today. Now, we unite to celebrate the conservation successes and accomplishments of the past while grappling with the challenges of the future.

The 45th ISTS Symposium will be held in “Port Elizabeth,” on the southeastern edge of the African continent. Port Elizabeth is the colonial name of the town now known as Gqeberha. It is often called “The Friendly City” because of its smaller size, friendly people, exquisite beaches, laid-back attitude and relatively affordable lifestyle.

The Boardwalk Hotel and Convention Centre is a comfortable beachfront venue located just five minutes from the Chief Dawid Stuurman International Airport (PLZ is the airport code). There is plenty of nearby accommodation, along with restaurants, shops, and entertainment, all within walking distance. A short ride from the airport means you will not need a car to get around. Come prepared to join the locals in their early morning activities along the promenade, like beach walking, jogging, dog walking, and open-water

swimming from sunrise onwards, gradually giving way during the day to more social activities, sunbathing and evening dining.

In addition to the workshops, meetings, and symposium events, this is also your opportunity to explore the rest of South Africa. There are multiple day trips available within an hour of the city, ranging from visits to the Addo Elephant and Tsitsikamma National Parks, or a boat trip to St Croix Island to see African penguins. If you have more time, a leisurely journey westward along the spectacular Garden Route will take you to Cape Town and the winelands, while a flight north to Kruger National Park, iSimangaliso Wetland Park, or Hluhluwe Game Reserve provide the chance for a safari to see the Big Five.

Plan your journey and make the most of it!

The website will go live on 1st June 2026 at www.ists-symposium45.org, and abstract submissions and

registration will open on 1st October 2026. In addition to the traditional symposium themes, we would like to encourage submissions around sea turtle medicine, “omics,” and health-related topics, habitat management including ecosystem functioning and ecological roles, coastal zone management, and opportunities presented by AI-driven technologies.

The symposium will also trial a few innovations, such as electronic posters and thematic days with plenary speakers sharing wisdom at the start of the day and capturing lessons learned at the end. Favourite events, such as the silent and live auctions, will be done in local style, but, as always, they rely on you to bring gifts and items to be auctioned.

We cannot wait to host you in South Africa and share our local hospitality. Stay tuned for updates, put your thinking caps on, and start planning your presentations and travels. Make the most of your travels to the edge of the African continent.