

Saving Sea Turtles

with José Urteaga

Main Idea People can save their region's valuable resources by revisiting traditional ideas and finding new economic solutions.

Identifying the Problem

In the early 1980s, sea turtles in Nicaragua began to disappear. Their decline in population was unusual, considering that they had outlived dinosaurs. For more than 100 million years, sea turtles migrated to Nicaragua's beaches to lay eggs, sometimes hatching 600,000 babies at a time. Emerging Explorer José Urteaga (uhr tay AH gah) is a young marine biologist who decided to find out why sea turtles were disappearing so fast that they were close to **extinction**, or dying out completely.

Urteaga discovered that **poachers**, people who hunt or fish illegally, were stealing sea turtle eggs from beach nests. Poor people in Nicaragua live on less than \$1 a day, but a poacher can earn as much as \$5 selling just 12 eggs a day, because of the great demand for the eggs. Sea turtle eggs are highly valued in Nicaraguan culture. Turtle meat and turtle eggs are traditional foods of the country. People also use sea turtle shells to make jewelry.

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For more on José Urteaga, try
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Finding a Solution

Urteaga knew that to save the turtle eggs, he had to help poor people earn money in other ways. He also had to encourage people to see their culture in a new way. Starting in 2002, he put together a team that worked with poachers, celebrities, young people, and conservation groups.

First, he convinced poachers to sell their turtle eggs to him so he could hatch them. Then he taught poachers how to make a living by farming, raising bees, guiding tourists, and making crafts. Urteaga even hired former poachers to patrol the beaches and protect the nests. He started hatcheries, places designed for hatching eggs, to make sure new generations of turtles would survive.

To inspire cultural change, Urteaga focused his message on young people. He launched a huge media campaign to reach this audience.

The campaign included sold-out rock concerts to raise awareness as well as celebrities stating, "I don't eat turtle eggs." His school programs teach children how important it is to protect the species. Children also have the opportunity to work with the hatcheries. In 2008, young people celebrated the first release of hatched baby turtles in their town's hatchery by wearing t-shirts showing a tiny turtle breaking out of its egg. Urteaga's goal is to end the demand for turtle eggs and save sea turtles from extinction by educating a new generation.

By 2010, thanks to Urteaga and his team, almost 90 percent of sea turtle nests became protected. Urteaga is committed to continue saving sea turtles by "motivat[ing] people through their brains and their hearts."

Before You Move On

Monitor Comprehension What actions are helping to change how people view Nicaragua's sea turtles?

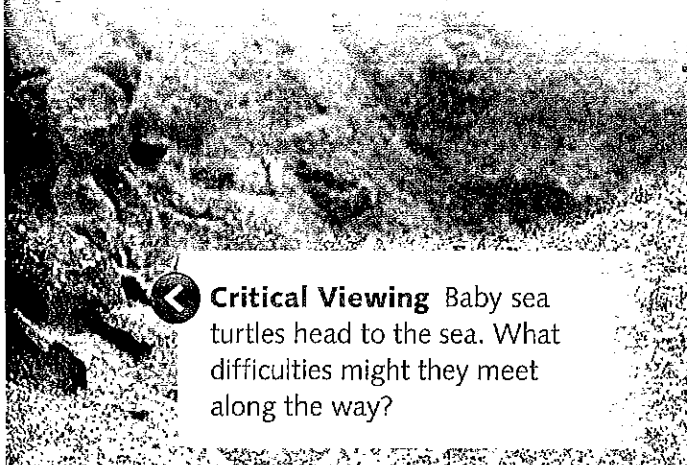
ONGOING ASSESSMENT

VIEWING LAB



Video Clip

- 1. Pose and Answer Questions** Write three questions about the efforts to save the sea turtles. Go to the **Digital Library** to watch the Explorer Video Clip. Then work with a partner to answer each other's questions.
- 2. Analyze Visuals** What did you find to be the most powerful image in the video?
- 3. Human-Environment Interaction** Why would it be important for Urteaga to get young people involved in his cause?



Critical Viewing Baby sea turtles head to the sea. What difficulties might they meet along the way?