

# SEA TURTLE

The scientist at **right** is holding the animal he's been crazy about since he was a kid. "I always thought dinosaurs were the coolest," he says. "Well, sea turtles are kind of like dinosaurs. But sea turtles are still around."

The scientist's name is Wallace J. Nichols, but people call him J. And he's right: Sea turtles have been on Earth at least 150 million years. They swam the oceans when dinosaurs were still roaming the land.

## TROUBLED WATERS

Now, though, sea turtles are in serious trouble. Why? Because people have killed too many sea turtles for their meat and beautiful shells. They've eaten too many turtle eggs. They've accidentally caught and killed too many turtles in their fishing nets.

*(Continued on p. 36)*



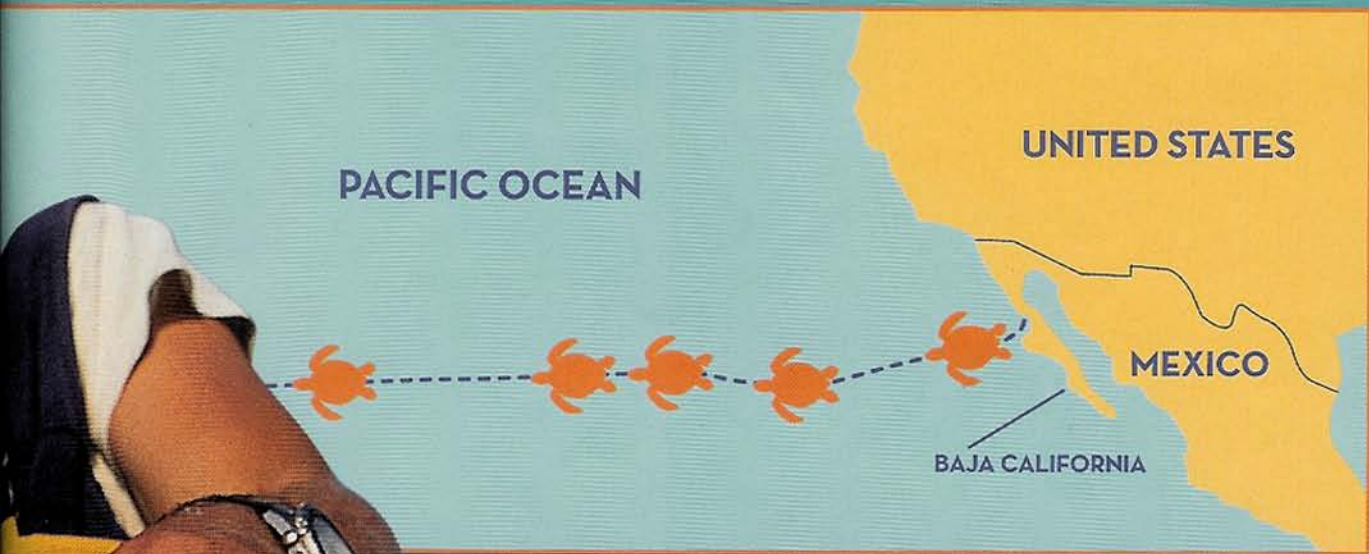
For more tracking information, go on the Web to [wildcoast.net](http://wildcoast.net) and click on "Research." Teachers can find out how to get involved by going online to [cccturtle.org](http://cccturtle.org) and clicking on "Sea Turtle Tracking Program."



# Saver

BY CYNTHIA GRABER; PHOTOS BY DAVID M. BARRON

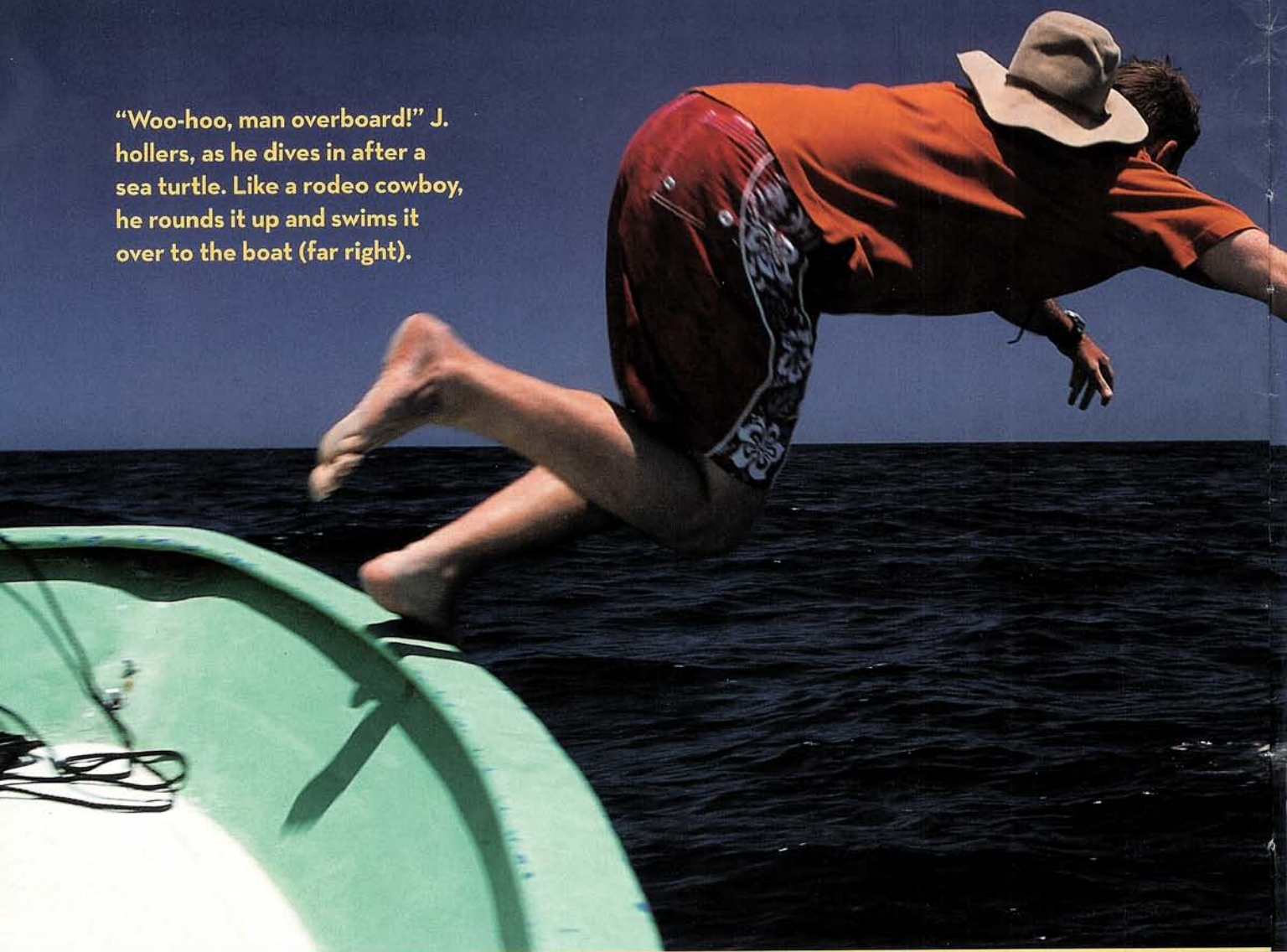
This guy is crazy about sea turtles. Can't you tell? Now find out what he's doing to help these endangered creatures.



The map behind J. shows the route of one loggerhead turtle, named Adelita. Starting from Baja California, in Mexico, Adelita traveled over 6,000 miles (9,700 km) to Japan! Why? She was on a mission to return to the beach where she hatched years before. There, she could mate and lay eggs of her own. Scientists and

school children used computers to follow her incredible year-long journey. This tracking project proved that some of Baja's turtles migrate all the way across the Pacific Ocean.

“Woo-hoo, man overboard!” J. hollers, as he dives in after a sea turtle. Like a rodeo cowboy, he rounds it up and swims it over to the boat (far right).



And their pollution trashes the turtles' ocean homes.

J. wanted to do something to help his favorite creatures. He thought a place in Mexico would be a good place to work. It's a peninsula just south of the U.S. state of California, and it's called Baja (BAH-hah) California (see map on page 35). He knew the waters there had plenty of crabs, sea grass, algae, and other food that turtles like.

Other scientists thought most of Baja's turtles had

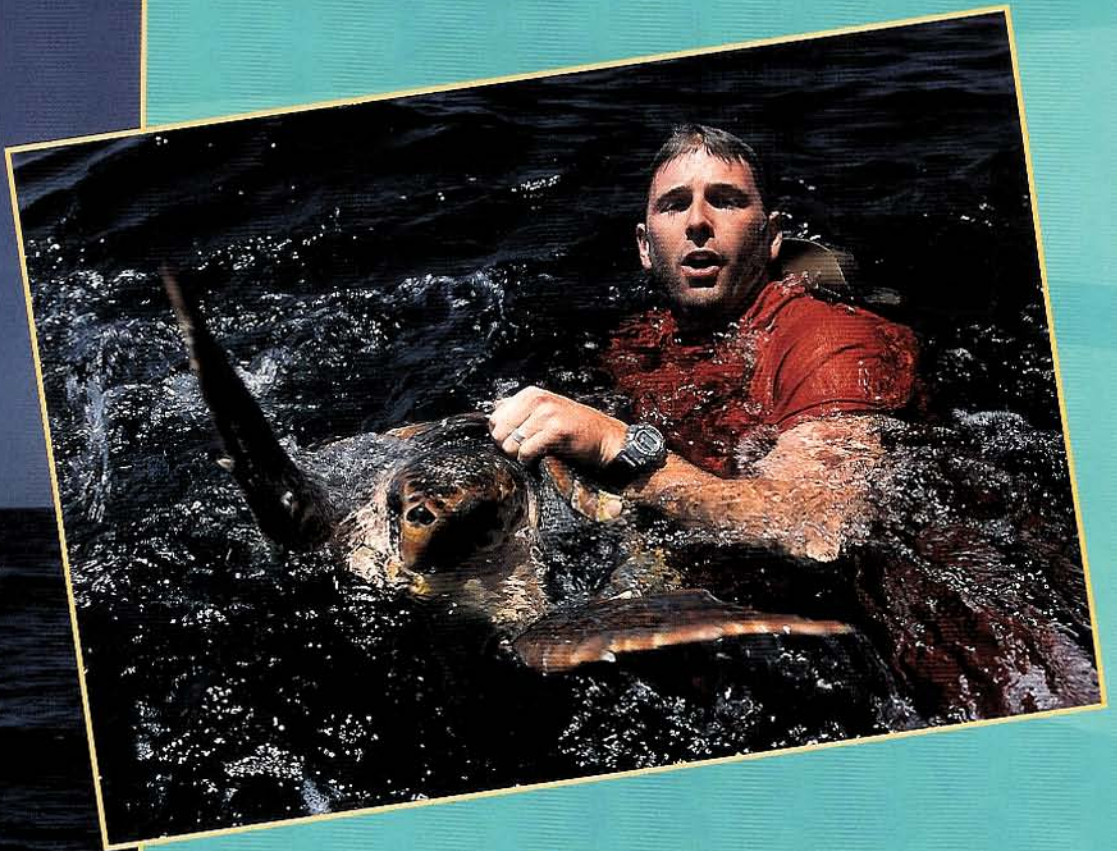
already disappeared. But J. decided to check it out anyway. What did he discover? That there were still plenty of turtles around Baja to study—and to protect.

### **MORE THAN SCIENCE**

J. had a big challenge. He had to find out all he could about Baja's turtles. How many were there? Where did they live? What kinds were they? How big do they get? Then he had to help keep them from disappearing forever.

Although it's now against the law to kill sea turtles in Mexico, it still happens. Turtle meat has always been on the menu in Mexico—especially during certain celebrations. It's not easy to change old ways.

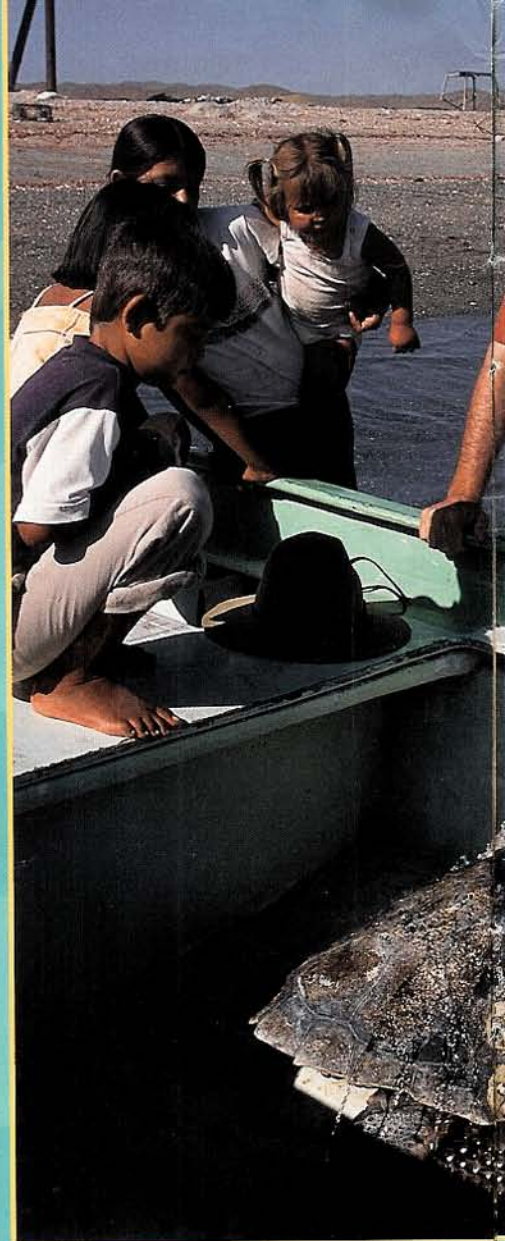
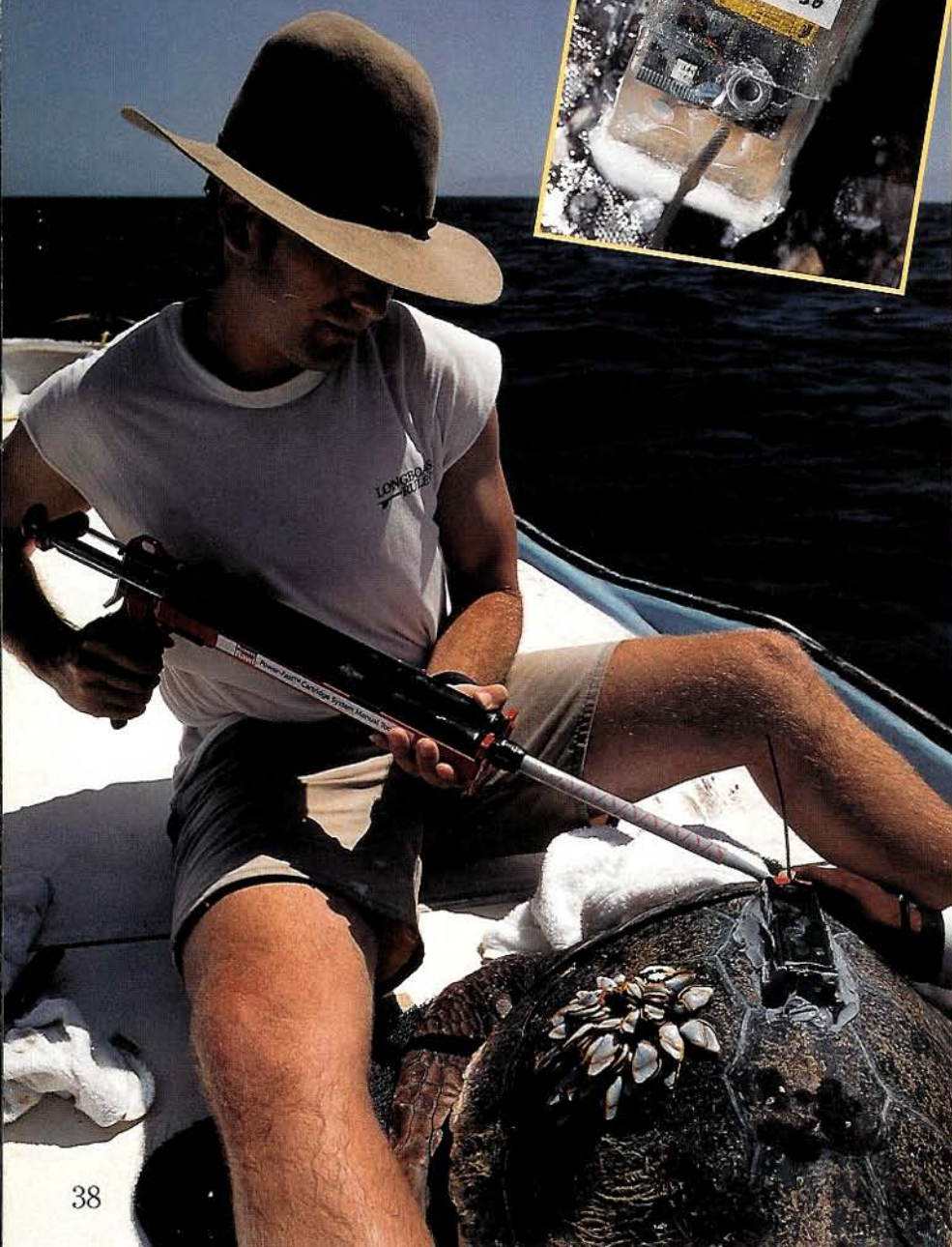
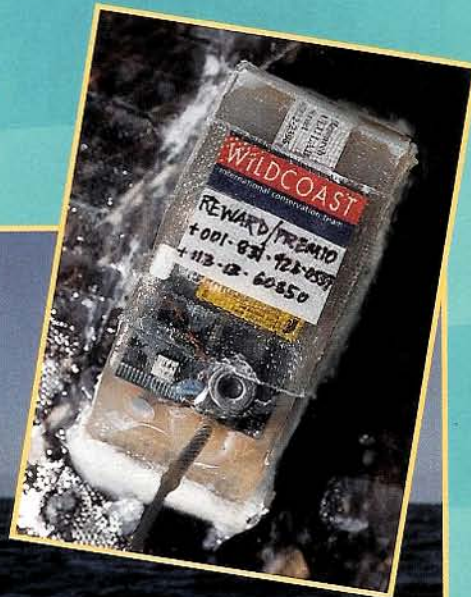
That's why J. knows that studying sea turtles isn't enough to protect them. He knows it's just as important to work with the local fishermen. They can show him where to find the turtles. They may even tell him who's



Each turtle that J. rounds up gets weighed and measured (left). Then it gets a tiny ID tag clipped to its flipper (above). If the turtle turns up later somewhere, someone can use the tag's information to let J. know what happened to it. Don't worry—tagging doesn't bother the turtle very much.

Sometimes a sea turtle leaves with something special: its very own transmitter. (See close-up in the small photo.) Below, J. uses a glue gun to attach the transmitter to the turtle's shell. When the turtle comes to the water's surface for air, the transmitter beams signals up to a space satellite.

The satellite sends the turtle's location back down to a computer on Earth. That way, J. and others can track where the turtle goes.



still catching turtles. Some of the fishermen who grew up eating turtles are now helping J. *save* turtles!

J. spends a lot of time talking about turtles to everyone he meets. And he works with the Mexican government too. "Sea turtles are very important to the Mexican people," J. says. "The more they learn about the turtles and the troubles they face, the more they'll want to protect them."

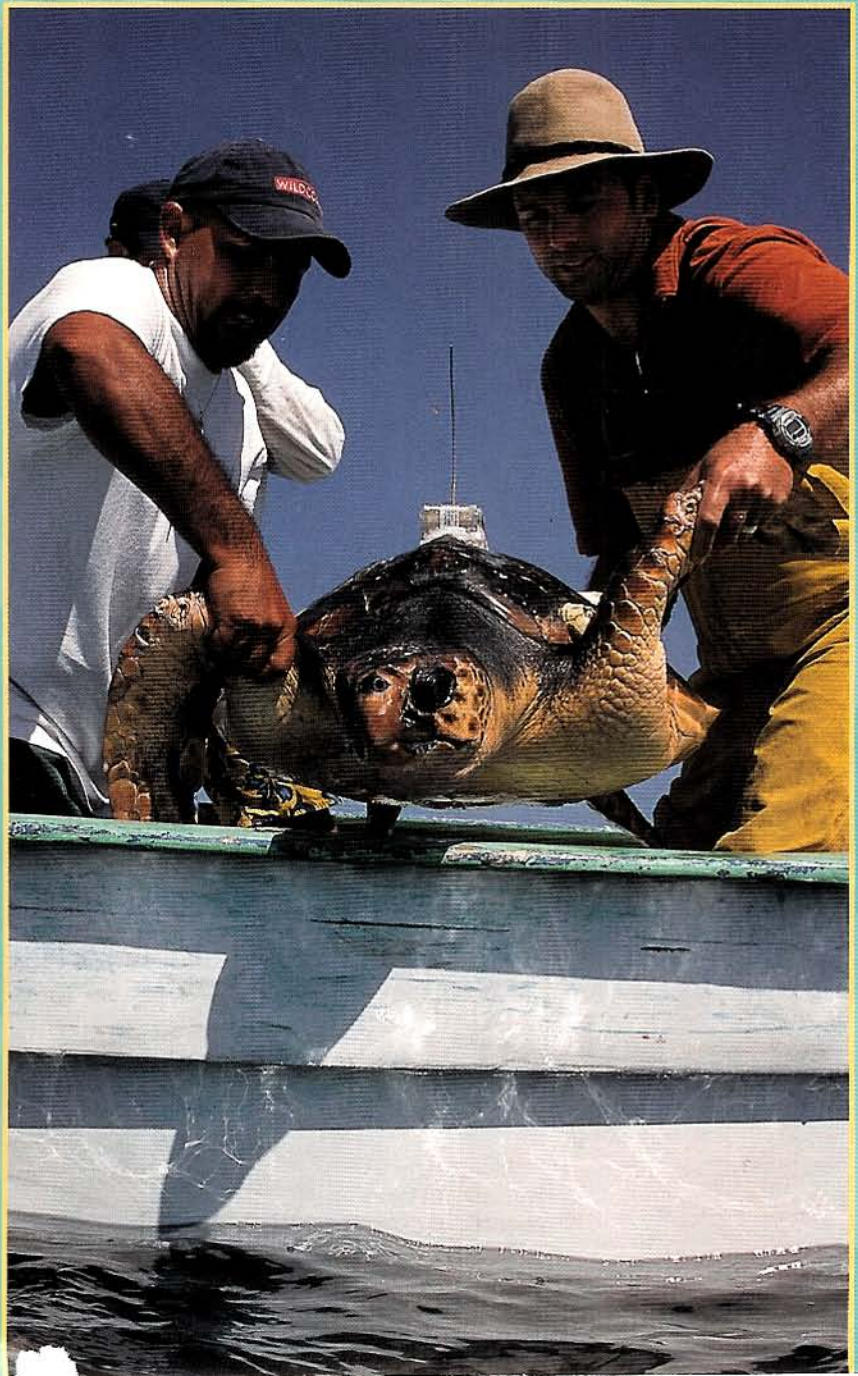


## HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

J.'s work has already made a difference. Many local people have agreed to stop eating turtle meat. They've even set aside several turtle-safe areas. They work together to make sure no turtles are killed in those areas.

J. is proud of the work his team and the townspeople are

doing to help save Baja's sea turtles. He says, "Sometimes I imagine becoming an old man and sitting around with the old fishermen of Baja. I picture our kids and grandkids all around us. And I picture sea turtles swimming everywhere in the beautiful waters. Then I think to myself, 'That's going to be great!'" 🐢



J. and several local kids enjoy some "turtle talk" before returning a turtle to the sea (above). One boy pours water on the turtle to keep it from drying out in the hot sun. The kids often choose names for the turtles that J. catches. They've named this one Socorro. After all the work is done, J. gets some help setting Socorro free (right).