

# Sole Searching in Paradise

My name is Marc W. Ward, I work for our oceans, and to protect marine life. We started developing a team 15 years ago and formed a non-profit organization called Sea Turtles Forever to stop poaching of marine turtles and revitalize their habitat, which is the habitat for a myriad of other marine organisms. All life on earth is connected, and some species, like Sea Turtles, are what we consider “corner stone” species that many other organisms rely on for a healthy existence. By protecting marine turtles a myriad of other organisms also benefit. To protect sea turtles you have to protect their habitat, no habitat no turtles.

Several years ago I was collaborating with a great conservationist from Australia named Lance Ferris. He had been studying the effect of marine plastics on Sea Turtles and after extensive necropsy determined that our Sea Turtles ingest marine plastics on a large scale and many die as a result. We had our team removing thousands of pounds of marine debris from our turtles nesting and foraging habitat so I was involved with marine turtle biology and marine plastic research. Not long after starting to collaborate with Lance he suffered a heart attack and passed away.

We were, as many others, very sad, but wanted to channel that emotion into something that Lance would appreciate. So we decided that having a marine plastic drive with our entire patrol team would be a good way to honor Lance.

We organized the “Lance Ferris Memorial” marine plastic drive and challenged others to see who could remove and document the most marine debris. Our team rose to the occasion, they worked for months collecting and documenting every single piece of marine debris we could find in our sea turtle nesting and foraging sites.

Was it a worthwhile endeavor, with millions of tons of debris in the ocean system, could we actually be making a difference? I had to search my soul and ask if it was right to have my already over worked volunteer team that was up all night protecting the beach from poachers out at daylight to do this work every day. We had to decide if it was worthwhile to push our team way beyond the limits of normal dedication to achieve this enormous task. We decided that it was absolutely essential that we restore and maintain our sea turtle habitat or all our work producing hatchlings would be wasted. And the memory of Lance drove us on, and we rose above the norm, and we succeeded in removing every single marine debris item for miles of coastline. I hope Lance would be proud.

We could all stand to do some sole searching; we could all reach out and do some small thing to help our marine environment. It may seem like an impossible mission to clean the millions of

tons of debris we now have floating up on our global beaches and in our marine habitat. It may seem hopeless and futile at times, but every little bit makes a difference, you can make a difference.

Think about what the ocean means to you, what the ocean does for you, how much we depend on the ocean for our happiness, sustenance, adventure, and pleasure. Just volunteer for a day with some organization, or simply even go out and walk a beach and pick a bag of plastic. It will help, and it can even be fun. I made a friendly wager I could pull in 1000 shoes for the Lance Ferris Memorial, I encountered 1041 lost soles. Join us, search your soul, help our mother ocean.