

# My Teacher the Turtle Man

**Steve Connett makes a  
difference one boy, one  
turtle at a time.**

*Steve Connett's tagging  
job provides biologists with  
baseline data for population  
studies, but it's his passion  
that may ultimately help  
save the species.*

**Last** year, I got a call from Steve Connett asking if I wanted to give him a hand tagging turtles in the northern Bahamas. It was early November and I was working the deck on a trawler, catching flatfish off New England. I told Steve I needed a few days to think about it. Three 16-hour days later, with winter coming on strong, the Bahamas started to sound pretty good.

I called Steve back. "Excellent," he said. "We'll make the run from Spanish Wells to Grand Bahama. Then we'll turtle out of the skiff. I'll drive. You'll be jumping them."

The last time I'd tagged turtles with Steve was in Bermuda in the early 1990s. We'd tagged maybe 30 green turtles up to 100 pounds. Steve's tagged more than 1,200 turtles and 12,000 sharks for scientific study. He works mostly with the Bahamas National Trust and the Archie Carr Center for Sea Turtle Research at the University of Florida.

For more than 30 years, from Great Inagua to Grand Bahama

and Nova Scotia to New England, Steve ran the sail training vessel, *Geronimo*, a 54-foot yawl built in 1964 for the St. George's School of Newport, Rhode Island. The boat carried eight students. The first mate, Babbie, was Steve's wife.

We learned how to sail by hand without mechanical aids. We also learned how to record and send weather conditions twice a day over the single side-band radio, learned how to plot a position on the chart with a pencil and dividers, and how to stand a watch. He taught us about blue shark migration and growth rates of green turtles and how to tag them for scientific research. He taught *The Sun Also Rises* and *Othello*, though I'd wager most students who shipped out on the *Geronimo* don't remember much about the murder of Desdemona. What we remembered was the 400-pound mako or 800-pound tiger at the rail, its tail banging the hull, its teeth gripped tight around the wire, with Steve's voice, anything but quiet: "Let's get a tag in that thing. We got a length yet? A sex? Come on, let's go. Quit messing around."

Besides being captain and mate, Steve and Babbie were

By JOHN LEE