

The Asian Turtle Crisis *Bulletin*

News from around the Region

Volume 1

Issue 3

November 2004

The Asian Turtle Crisis Bulletin includes a brief summary of activities involving turtle conservation and research in the region that have been reported over the previous month through the Asian Turtle Conservation Network (ATCN). This bulletin is produced periodically by the ATCN and distributed electronically to individuals with interest in the Asian turtle crisis.

Region

CITES Appendix III Additions

Source: Notification to the Parties (November 19, 2004)

The following species were added to CITES Appendix III in accordance with the request of the People's Republic of China:

Emydidae

Chinemys megacephala

Chinemys nigricans

Chinemys reevesii

Geoemyda spengleri

Mauremys iversoni

Mauremys pritchardi

Ocadia glyphistonma

Ocadia philippeni

Ocadia sinensis

Sacalia bealei

Sacalia pseudocellata

Sacalia quadriocellata

Trionychidae

Palea steindachneri

Pelodiscus axenaria

Pelodiscus maackii

Pelodiscus parviformis

Pelodiscus sinensis

Rafetus swinhoi

Cambodia

Sre Ambel *Batagur* Conservation Project Update (November 2004): The Sre Ambel *Batagur baska* Project fielded their nesting beach teams in November in preparation for the coming nesting season. Of 15 suitable beaches that are watched on the Sre Ambel and Kaong Rivers, five are regular nesting beaches for *Batagur baska*. Members of the local conservation team monitor the beaches checking for tracks in the morning and warning away fishermen that may be fishing in the immediate area and disrupt the nesting process.

Recently, a large female was reported to have been spotted by local fishermen at the junction of the Sre Ambel, Kaong, and Stung Prongroul Rivers, and the Fisheries Department patrol team has begun alerting fishermen about the potential presence of female terrapins migrating upriver.

New *Manouria impressa* record for western Cardamom Mountains

Field biologists from Fauna and Flora International produced a second live record for *Manouria impressa* in the Cardamom Mountains during the month of November. The tortoise was found on Phnom Tumpor (at the western end of the Cardamom Mountains, within Phnom Samkos Wildlife Sanctuary) by Richard Paley (FFI) and Chav Thou of the Ministry of Environment. The recent finding is important as records now indicate that *Manouria impressa* can be found across the entire Cardamom Mountain range. A previous live record was reported from the opposite end of the range by students from Phnom Penh University in October, and shells have recently been found in hill villages between these sites.

Point of Interest: Turtles in Trade Wrapped in Cellophane to Restrict Movement: Last month the ATCN reported on trade seizures in the eastern province of Mondulkiri involving turtles. As a point of interest, further information indicated that traders had wrapped the turtles in cellophane in at least one case in order to evade inspection authorities that might be alerted by the noise of the turtles moving about. This is the first such instance that we are aware of involving use of cellophane in major trade shipments to restrict movement of turtles during transit.

Royal University of Phnom Penh Central Cardamom Mountain Project:

The Royal University of Phnom Penh Turtle Team (BP Conservation Award focused on turtle surveys in the Cardamom Mountains) has produced a report on the results of their surveys in 2004. The report is now available on the www.Asianturtlenetwork.org

Indonesia

Indonesian Turtle Program Office to Be Founded (November, 2004): The Gibbon Foundation announced that it would support the development of an Indonesian Turtle Group office that will be located not far from the Forestry University in Bogor. Organized by a young Spanish turtle enthusiast, Rodrigo Ibarra Vazquez (AKA Bonggi) the office will provide a base of operations for students involved in conservation and research projects focused on Indonesian turtles. Bonggi outlined the main tasks of the new office as including:

- Establishment of a Turtle Conservation Rescue and Breeding Center at Samboya Lestari Conservation Complex in Balikpapan, Kalimantan
- Conservation of the critically endangered *Chelodina mccordi*
- Development of the Indonesian Turtle Conservation Group

According to Bonggi, the Gibbon Foundation will also support a computer, resources, and small grants for turtle projects.

Myanmar

Arakan Forest Turtle Surveys

Source: Win Ko Ko, WCS Turtle Conservation Team Coordinator

Arakan Forest (western Myanmar, November 2004): The Forestry Department and WCS turtle team coordinator Win Ko Ko returned from a month-long survey in the Tanlwe Ma-e chaung region of Rakhine State (Arakan Forest). During the survey period that involved a hike across the Arakan forest from east to west, 133 shells and six live turtles were encountered representing six species. Surveys involved interviews with local hunters and in villages along the route, as well as examining stream habitat and bamboo forest. The most common species encountered along the way was *Indotestudo elongata* followed by *Heosemys depressa*, most of these being shells recovered from local villages where the turtles are consumed locally as a food source. One live

Amyda cartilaginea and five live *Cyclemys* sp. were also observed during the trip, as well as shell remains of *Manouria impressa* and *Manouria emys*.

The survey was part of a more strategic effort to determine the status of the Arakan Forest Turtle (*Heosemys depressa*). *H. depressa* is endemic to Myanmar, and little is known about the status or distribution of wild populations. WCS and the Wildlife and Nature Conservation Division of the Forestry Department plan to implement a project focused on conservation of the species in the southern Arakan Forest complex.

Initial Findings on Upper Chindwin River Research on Nesting Ecology:

Source: Mandalay University

Chindwin River (October 22 – November 20, 2004): Win Win Mar and Thi Thin Khaing, PhD students from Yadanabon University carried out a field survey on the upper Chindwin River. Interviews with local people suggested that as many as 15-20 *Kachuga* nestings occurred on beaches between February 27 and March 20 2004. The survey confirmed earlier work by Kuchling suggesting the presence of a nesting population in a small northern section of the river. Local people reported that 160 eggs were recovered from 28 holes (estimated to be 15-20 clutches).

Coastal Surveys of Rakhine State and the Ayeyarwaddy Division:

Source: Kalyar, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand/WCS Asia Region

Western Myanmar (April-July 2004): A survey was carried out in April through July of 2004 along coastal areas in western Myanmar to obtain data on the conservation status, ecology, and exploitation of *Heosemys depressa* and other species in the survey area. The survey, completed by Kalyar, Khin Myo Myo (WCS), and staff of the Fisheries Department involved visits to thirteen townships and 103 villages in Rakhine state and Ayeyarwaddy Division. Findings indicated that tortoises and freshwater turtles are hunted for both local consumption and export trade to Thailand and China. Principal species hunted and traded include *Amyda cartilaginea*, *Indotestudo elongata*, *Heosemys depressa*, *Morenia ocellata*, *Lissemys punctata*, and *Cyclemys* spp. A single *Manouria emys* and *Pyxidea mouhotii* carapace were also observed during the course of the surveys.

Notes about Hunting and Trade of *Heosemys depressa*: Plastrons are retained and sold for medicinal use. During a one-month survey period in Rakhine state, 57 shells and 15 living *Heosemys depressa* were observed. Hunters that were interviewed reported that *H. depressa* is considered common in lower Rakhine state with each hunter catching roughly 300-500 turtles each year. *Heosemys* reportedly sells for 40 Yuan/kg at border towns.

Notes on *Batagur baska* in Myanmar: According to information from local people living in coastal areas of Rakhine State and Ayeyarwaddy Division, small numbers of *Batagur baska* may remain in some rivers. A single large individual was caught in January 2004 by fishing net in the lower Ayeyarwaddy estuary. Other reports suggest that a few individuals may remain at other sites as well along the coast of Rakhine State, but surveys could not verify local information.

***Kachuga trivittata* Conservation Program Development at Yadanabon Zoo:**

Efforts to conserve the Burmese roofed terrapins (*Kachuga trivittata*), one of the world's most critically endangered turtle species, gained momentum in November as conservationists, researchers, and local partners met in Mandalay to develop a proposed project focused on stabilizing wild populations and initiating a conservation breeding program based at the zoo.

Gerald Kuchling, who has completed a number of field surveys in Myanmar for *Kachuga trivittata* and was first to identify three adults in a Mandalay pagoda pond four years ago, is a key proponent of conservation efforts for *K. trivittata* and is working closely with the zoo to develop facilities for breeding, nesting, and rearing of juveniles that may later be released into the wild.

Gerald is also helping provide guidance to students from Mandalay University that are carrying out field research projects involving several large river turtle species, including *Kachuga trivittata*.

The Yadanabon Zoo presently holds seven of nine known captive specimens of the Burmese roofed terrapin. All of the Yadanabon Zoo turtles were received from fishermen or found in local villages along the Dokhtawady and Chindwin Rivers, the last two remaining sites where small populations of the species are known.

The conservation breeding program at Yadanabon Zoo is supported by the Bronx Zoo, TCF, TSA, and Gerald Kuchling.

Mandalay University Students Pursue Interests in Asian Turtles:

Mandalay (November 2004): Conservation Biologist Gerald Kuchling and Doug Hendrie, Asian Turtle Coordinator (ATC), jointly hosted a presentation for Mandalay University students and professors from Mandalay and other regional universities on Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles. The ATC provided students with an overview of the Asian turtle crisis, while Gerald focused on the status and ecology of Myanmar's tortoises and freshwater turtles, with particular reference to *Kachuga trivittata*. Presently there are five PhD students and ten Masters' students at Mandalay University working on projects involving turtles. Professor Mya Mya of the Department of Zoology at Mandalay University has been instrumental in encouraging her students to pursue research on Myanmar's turtles, particularly those that are endemic to the country. Professors from other institutions were invited to the informal presentation in Mandalay in order to hopefully encourage their interest in involving additional students in similar research efforts.

Malaysia

Setui River Conservation Project 2004 Review:

No new developments reported from the Setui River Project during November

Vietnam

Hanoi Agriculture University Talk

Hanoi (November 22): About 86 students from Hanoi's Agricultural University gathered for a talk on Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles by Douglas Hendrie, Asian Regional Turtle Conservation Coordinator, and Bui Dang Phong, manager of Cuc Phuong National Park's Turtle Conservation Center (TCC). The presentation included a basic overview of the ecology of turtles, as well as an introduction to the Asian turtle crisis, and review of the threats, values, and conservation needs of Vietnam's turtles. Bui Dang Phong presented some examples of turtles that are currently under the care of the TCC, and briefly introduced the TCC and its activities. The talk is part of ongoing efforts by the Vietnam Turtle Conservation Program in cooperation with Cuc Phuong National Park to raise awareness about the critical threats to Vietnam's turtles and build interest and expertise in turtles amongst university students.

New *Mauremys* Hatchling Enclosures

Six new specialized enclosures were completed in November for juvenile *Mauremys annamensis* as part of the park's efforts to build a captive assurance population for Vietnam's only endemic turtle species. The park has been successfully breeding *M. annamensis* for more than three years with annual production averaging about 15-23 new hatchlings from four adult females in the program. All of the founders were originally confiscated from the illegal wildlife trade by provincial wildlife protection authorities.

Each new enclosure includes a sunken pool and bordering terrestrial habitat for about five to ten juveniles. Finding space for new hatchlings has become one of the difficulties that the TCC has been facing as its breeding programs have become more successful over the last two years. More than 346 hatchlings representing 10 species have been hatched at the TCC since 2002.

Special thanks to the Muenster Zoo for supporting development of the *Mauremys annamensis* facilities.

Turtles of Vietnam Postcards

The Vietnam turtle conservation program has produced a set of ten postcards featuring some of Vietnam's endangered tortoises and freshwater turtles. The postcards will be used as part of a new initiative aimed at helping build greater financial sustainability for Cuc Phuong National Park's Turtle Conservation Center, through development of supplemental funding mechanisms. They have been made available to visitors of the TCC, and through Education for Nature – Vietnam.

Point of Interest: *Pyxidea mouhotii* Found Sharing Wintering Cave

Source: Tim McCormack, Vietnam Turtle Conservation Program Research Coordinator

Cuc Phuong National Park, November 20: The Cuc Phuong field research team was surprised when they found a new keeled box turtle (*Pyxidea mouhotii*) sharing a wintering cave with one of the subject turtles involved in their radio telemetry study. While checking on adult female 105, one of 13 turtles fitted with a radio transmitter and involved in the home range and ecology study, the field team noted the presence of a second adult female in the same cave. The small cave was about 3-4m deep, 1.5m wide with a height of 20cm and a flat soil substrate. The event is somewhat unusual in that the species is not very common in the park, and the field team has come across only one or two other individuals in the wild since the study began in July 2003.

The new turtle was subsequently fitted with a new transmitter and released back into the cave to become part of the study. The study is being funded by the Humane Society International and a grant by the Rufford Foundation.

Trade Seizures Reported

Thanh Hoa Trade seizure Nets Turtles from Public Bus

Source: Bui Dang Phong, Cuc Phuong National Park, TCC

Thanh Hoa Province, Vietnam (November 10, 2004): Thanh Hoa Forest Protection Department rangers stopped a public bus traveling north on highway 1 with an illegal shipment of wildlife onboard. Fifty two turtles were confiscated (49kg) comprised mainly of *Cyclemys tcheponensis* (47 individuals). They were transferred to Cuc Phuong National Park's Turtle Conservation Center (TCC). Also confiscated were three *Heosemys grandis* and two juvenile *Hieremys annandalii*. All of the turtles were in fair condition and are being maintained in quarantine at the TCC.

Large Shipment of Turtles Confiscated in Myanmar

Mandalay City, Myanmar (November): Wildlife In November, the Mandalay Nature and Wildlife Conservation Division confiscated more than 500 turtles from traders, representing five species. The turtles included *Indotestudo elongata*, *Nilssonina formosa*, *Amyda cartilaginea*, *Lissemys scuttata*, *Morenia ocellata*, and *Cyclemys* sp. *Morenia ocellata*, *Lissemys scuttata*, and *Indotestudo elongata* comprised the bulk of the shipment.

The Asian Turtle Conservation Network

For reports and other news-worthy notes of interest, visit the ATCN website at www.asianturtlenetwork.org

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