

Turtle Conservation Vietnam

Newsletter of the Turtle Conservation and Ecology Project (TCEP)

Volume 1

Issue 2

December 31, 2000

Turtle Conservation Vietnam is produced by the Turtle Conservation and Ecology Project (TCEP). The newsletter is aimed at providing national institutions and government agencies with information that will enhance conservation efforts, as well as raise public interest and awareness about the need to protect Vietnam's chelonians. A Vietnamese language of the Microsoft Publisher version (with photos) is distributed in Vietnam.

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A Second Chance for Turtles (TCEP Press Release, November 30, 2000)

On November 25, a task force involving wildlife protection authorities from three provinces, the city of Hanoi, Fauna and Flora International (FFI), and the World-wide Fund for Nature (WWF) at Cat Tien National Park carried out the country's first large-scale translocation of turtles back to their native habitat in the south of Vietnam. The release involved 366 *Indotestudo elongata* (the elongated tortoise) which were seized from illegal wildlife traders in the north of Vietnam as they were being smuggled to China. The turtles represent individuals from six separate shipments. Ninh Binh and Thanh Hoa provincial rangers had rescued half of the turtles as they traveled north in trucks and buses along National Highway 1. Another shipment was discovered in August by the Hanoi Forest Protection Branch on a Vietnam Airlines flight from Ho Chi Minh City. Cat Tien National Park (Dong Nai Province) was selected as the release site based on the suitability of habitat, prior records of the species' occurrence at the park, and the high level of effectiveness demonstrated by Cat Tien rangers in protecting the park.

For the return trip south, the turtles were packed in straw within specially designed crates and loaded aboard a hired truck. Staff of Cuc Phuong-based Turtle Conservation and Ecology Project (TCEP) and Soc Son director Pham Nhu Bich, and Nguyen Van Nhung, a veterinarian from the Hanoi Forest Protection Branch accompanied the shipment to Cat Tien National Park. The turtles were then unpacked and held in secure enclosures prepared by the park, before being released in small groups at secret locations within the park.

"Some of these turtles, which are probably 40-60 years old, were on their way to China less than a month ago" says Douglas Hendrie of FFI, who manages the TCEP. "For the turtles, this is a second chance to complete their natural life where they belong."

Hendrie said that as recently as four years ago there were reports of up to 18 tons of turtles crossing the border into China each day. "Turtles are long-lived species," Hendrie says. "Some species may require a life time to replace themselves."

Scientists are quick to note that turtles have been around for 200 million years on earth. Their survivorship strategy seems to have worked well in a world without humans. But Hendrie and other turtle conservationists harbor serious doubts about whether turtles can survive in the modern world without serious intervention.

Scientists warn that exploitation of turtles to feed the insatiable demand of Chinese markets is systematically destroying Indochina's wild turtle populations. Hendrie notes that "ten years ago, much of the trade in turtles was coming from source areas in Vietnam. However, most of what we are seeing today is probably from Cambodia and Laos." These assertions are supported by evidence from the field suggesting that Vietnam's turtles are nearly exhausted, with remnant populations of some species holding on in shrinking natural areas that remain under significant hunting and encroachment pressures from outside.

"The best way to ensure that turtles remain a part of Vietnam's natural heritage into the 21st century is to provide greater protection for turtles which still exist in their natural habitat, ," Hendrie says. "This will require a serious commitment by protected area managers to increase the effectiveness of their enforcement units, and build a determined and successful enforcement program aimed at both protecting wildlife and wildlife habitat."

Through cooperation with a growing network of provincial ranger units, the TCEP hopes to encourage other provincial wildlife protection authorities to increase the level of protection for Vietnam's remaining turtles. The Cat Tien release represents an important step in conservation of Vietnam's turtles. "The turtles released at Cat Tien may not save the world for turtles, but they have been returned to the region where they belong and given another chance" Hendrie says. "All of us who were involved in this process, especially the Cat Tien rangers, who provided essential ground support once the turtles made it to the park, hope that this release will set an example for others to follow, and bring immediate attention upon the need to do something now to protect Vietnam's endangered wildlife before it is too late."

TCEP staff release *Indotestudo elongata* at Cat Tien National Park in November. Turtles were released in small groups at dozens of locations throughout the park.

More from the Cat Tien Translocation

Upper left: *Indotestudo elongata* received from Ninh Binh rangers await processing at the TCEP.

Lower left: Nguyen The Cuong prepares turtles for shipment to Cat Tien. The turtles were soaked in water before being carefully placed in straw-lined crates.

Upper right: A final check of the turtles before they are loaded onto a truck to Dong Nai. The translocation team accompanied the shipment south, spending 40 hours on the road before finally reaching Cat Tien.

Bottom: Temporary holding pens were constructed for turtles at Cat Tien.

Lower left: A Cat Tien ranger discusses potential release sites in the park.

Training and Education

TCEP Workshops for Rangers Encourage Greater Protection for Turtles

In August, the Thanh Hoa Forest Protection Department rangers participated in a training workshop on "*The Ecology of, and Threats to Vietnam's Turtles*" at Cuc Phuong National Park. The workshops are routinely held for provincial and protected area ranger units as part of an effort to increase front-line enforcement officers' understanding of the threats to Vietnam's turtles resulting from loss of habitat and the illegal wildlife trade. About a third of the Thanh Hoa provincial ranger force attended the August workshop, and the remainder of the rangers are expected to attend a second round in late December or early January.

A second workshop was held for rangers at Cat Tien National Park in November, coinciding with the release of more than 360 *Indotestudo elongata* at the park.

Photo: Thanh Hoa rangers participate in a "Turtle Ecology and Trade" workshop hosted by the TCEP at Cuc Phuong National Park.

A "Turtle Ecology and Trade" workshop was also held in November for Cat Tien National Park rangers, coinciding with the release of turtles at the park.

Cuc Phuong Turtle Ecologist Internship at the Wetland Institute

TCEP Turtle Ecologist Le Thien Duc had an opportunity to expand his experience and knowledge about turtle conservation through participation in a special intern program at the Wetland Institute, located at Stone Harbor in New Jersey, USA. Thanks to the efforts of herpetologist William Espenshade and Wetland Institute Director Roger Wood, Mr. Duc was able to spend eight weeks working with American scientists and other volunteers on the institute's Terrapin Conservation Program.

In addition to working with diamondback terrapins (*Malaclemys terrapin*), Duc worked on avian and fish surveys, as well as sharpening his computer skills (Duc managed to keep us all informed of his activities with regular email and a collection of scanned photos that took forever to download).

Duc's involvement may mark the beginning of an ongoing training program whereby young turtle ecologists in Indochina are provided with similar opportunities to work and gain experience for several months with Wetland Institute staff on a variety of projects aimed at expanding their practical field experience.

1. Wetland Institute director Roger Wood and TCEP ecologist Le Thien Duc following a presentation for research staff of the institute about turtle conservation in Vietnam.
2. Mr. Duc checks traps for diamondback terrapins during a summer internship with the Wetland Institute.

Opportunity for Turtle Ecologists Abroad

The Wetland Institute will be providing opportunities for three intern turtle ecologist from the Indochina region during the summer of 2001. Interns will spend six to eight weeks at the Wetland Institute, Stone Harbor, NJ (USA) working with researchers on a variety of projects in the field, including work with diamondback terrapins.

Applicants must possess adequate English language communication skills, a strong interest in turtles, and a demonstrated commitment to conservation and/or biological research in their country.

For more information, please contact Douglas Hendrie, internship coordinator for Southeast Asia and China: cpcp@fpt.vn

Discover "The Adventures of Lucky Turtle"

An illustrated children's story about a turtle that is captured by hunters, escapes, and must find his way home. The book is aimed at increasing the reader's understanding of the unique ecology, threats and conservation needs of Vietnam's turtles, and is used as a resource within the project's education programs. (printed in Vietnamese, 3 booklets/English text available) Contact: Nguyen Thi Thao: cpmail@fpt.vn

Field Research and Translocation

In Search of *Rafetus swinhoei*

A survey team led by Dr. Peter Pritchard of the Chelonian Research Institute (USA) headed for Phu Tho Province in November to investigate reports of giant softshell turtles living along the Red River and adjacent wetlands in provinces west and northwest of Hanoi. Dr. Pritchard and TCEP associate biologist Nguyen Quang Truong of IEBR, and Cuc Phuong turtle ecologist Le Thien Duc interviewed fishermen, local traders, and other people living along the Red River. Viewing the skeletal remains of a large *Rafetus swinhoei* softshells, Dr. Pritchard was able to confirm that this species inhabited the Ao Chau wetland in Phu Tho, as recently as 15 years ago. Most local reports seemed to turn up the more common Chinese softshell, *Pelodiscus sinensis*, and restaurants and local traders were able to produce numerous examples of the smaller *Pelodiscus*.

Rafetus swinhoei is one of Asia's largest softshell turtle species, and is native to southern China, its range probably historically extending southward into northern Vietnam along the Red River drainage. In recent years, a single specimen of *Rafetus* was caught by fishermen in Hoa Binh Province on the Song Da tributary of the Red River. Another specimen is maintained at Hanoi University. However, people are most familiar with a living specimen of *Rafetus* found in Hoan Kiem Lake, Hanoi.

The results of the initial *Rafetus* survey will be reported by Dr. Pritchard, and further field surveys may be carried out to learn more about remnant populations of this species surviving in Vietnam.

Dr. Peter Pritchard examines one of many Chinese softshell turtles (*Pelodiscus sinensis*) observed during interviews in villages along the Red River.

Turtles Go Home: First Local Releases Carried Out by TCEP

During late summer the TCEP launched its first formal release of turtles confiscated from hunters and traders, releasing *Pyxidea mouhotii* at Cuc Phuong National Park. In this case, the *Pyxidea* were confiscated from a local hunter in the western Boui River Valley by Cuc Phuong rangers. A second release in October followed the arrest of a hunter in the park's interior. Several more *Pyxidea mouhotii* were confiscated and released by TCEP staff and rangers. Also in October, Nho Quan District rangers (along the northeastern border of the park) arrested a regional trader as he transported turtles and snakes from several local commune-level traders. Sixteen more *Pyxidea mouhotii* were recovered and turned over the TCEP. The turtles were processed and photographed before being released back into the park.

The Cuc Phuong and Nho Quan ranger forces deserve special recognition for recovering animals before the animals were transported from the source region. Recently confiscated animals require minimal rehabilitation time before they may be placed back into what is known to be their native range, natural habitat, and region of origin.

***Manouria* Released at Pu Mat**

In October, an emergency translocation was carried out for a group of 21 *Manouria impressa* that were recovered in healthy condition from the trade after being seized in a shipment originating from Nghe An Province. The *Manouria* were transported overland to Pu Mat Nature Reserve in southern Nghe An, and released in to the forest. *Manouria impressa* are native to Pu Mat, and the release was carried out in cooperation with Ninh Binh and Pu Mat Forest Protection Department rangers.

The TCEP carried out its first planned translocation of turtles confiscated from the illegal trade in October. The release was carried out in cooperation with Ninh Binh FPD and rangers from Pu Mat Nature Reserve. Ninh Binh Province.

Turtle Conservation Center Development

Soc Son Rescue Center Developments

In support of recent developments and cooperation with Hanoi-based rangers, twelve new enclosures for terrestrial turtles were constructed at Soc Son Rescue Center, as part of TCEP efforts to improve facilities for turtles at the strategically-placed rescue center just north of Hanoi. Soc Son Rescue Center was established in 1997 to provide facilities for animals confiscated by the Hanoi Forest Protection Branch (FPB). FPB rangers are responsible for controlling trade in the Hanoi region, including monitoring bus, railway, airport, and major road links. Hanoi is a major transit point in the trade network, and most wildlife smuggled into Vietnam from Laos and Cambodia, as well as from regions within Vietnam, flows northward through Hanoi before branching out along several routes for the border of China. In the past, Soc Son Rescue Center has been overwhelmed with large trade seizures often involving several tons of reptiles, as well as bears, macaques, clouded leopards, and other wildlife. Efforts in early 2000 by the TCEP have involved the training of both Soc Son and Hanoi FPB rangers on the ecology of and threats to Vietnam's turtles, as well as some further efforts to develop closer links with Soc Son that will help the center better manage turtles confiscated from the trade. The new enclosures initially housed *Indotestudo elongata*, which were later translocated to Cat Tien National Park.

The TCEP has helped Soc Son Rescue Center establish 12 terrestrial enclosures for *Indotestudo elongata* following an August seizure of more than 350 kilos of elongated tortoises in Hanoi.

A new enclosure was constructed for *Cyclemys pulchristriata* that includes and functioning stream and deep pool. The "forest stream" was supported with funds from the AZA.

Above: Ten aquatic tanks were constructed within a new 6 x 14 m² quarantine cage. Each cement tank includes a small terrestrial section where turtles may bask or spend time on land. The new quarantine facilities were built with support from Rotterdam Zoo. **Right center:** *Heosemys grandis* and *Hieremys annandalii* enclosures under construction (with support from WWF Japan). **Lower right:** The new quarantine cage after completion. Plastic tubs hold aquatic turtles recently received from the trade.

Turtle Trade Journal

Rangers Lead Efforts to Protect Vietnam's Turtles

Ninh Binh and Thanh Hoa Province Forest Protection Department rangers have demonstrated their commitment to helping protect the future of Vietnam's turtle species. Traders and smugglers using road routes north to Hanoi and the Chinese border must pass through both northern provinces on Highway 1, running the risk that alert rangers stationed along the highway will discover their precious illegal cargo.

Between June and December, Ninh Binh and Thanh Hoa rangers seized 13 shipments that included nearly two tones of turtles representing 19 of 23 native species. Trade seizures have also included many more tons of snakes, as well as other wildlife like porcupines, pangolins, monitor lizards, and civets. Most of the turtles that were in shipments without legal permits were confiscated by rangers and turned over to the Turtle Conservation and Ecology Project (TCEP).

Turtles received at the TCEP undergo rehabilitation after surviving harsh conditions associated with being stacked and packed in crates and bags on their way to China. Many of the turtles that recover fully will be returned to their home regions and released in suitable habitat. Others remain under the care of the center where they may be studied or used for education and training programs.

The TCEP has been working with Ninh Binh Provincial rangers and the National Forest Protection Department since the project's origin in 1998. In 2000, cooperation was expanded to include additional key provinces, protected areas, and enforcement units, including Thanh Hoa, Hanoi, and Nghe An rangers. The TCEP carries out training programs for rangers on the ecology and threats to Vietnam's turtles, as part of efforts to generate greater interest, understanding, and immediate action in support of conserving Vietnam's rapidly disappearing turtles. TCEP thanks the rangers of Ninh Binh and Thanh Hoa for their efforts on behalf of turtles in Vietnam.

TCEP staff weigh, measure, and record more than 400 turtles seized by Thanh Hoa rangers in November.

Rangers and TCEP staff inspect a shipment of *Indotestudo elongata* seized in Thanh Hoa during October. Since October the TCEP has received more than 450 confiscated *Indotestudo* from the trade.

Hanoi Rangers Foil Illegal Air Shipment of Tortoises

In August, Hanoi Forest Protection Branch rangers raced to Hanoi's Noi Bai Airport in response to reports that a large shipment of tortoises was being transported there from Ho Chi Minh City on a Vietnam Airlines flight. The rangers subsequently confiscated a 385 kg shipment of *Indotestudo elongata* and 205 kg of other turtles, in addition to an incredible 2,932 kg of mixed snake species. The man who intended to receive the shipment was apprehended and reported that the shipment was to be loaded on trucks and shipped to the Mong Cai border crossing with China (northeast). The *Indotestudo elongata* were turned over to Soc Son Rescue Center where they were held in quarantine and released at Cat Tien National Park in late November (See article: *Second Chance for Turtles*).

Wildlife Trade Observation Reports: Vietnam

Detailed information relating to observations within the wildlife trade submitted to TRAFFIC SEA. To be added to our distribution list or receive electronic copies of current or past reports, please contact: cpcp@fpt.vn

Trade Enforcement Alerts

Marked For Release: Turtles with Notches

Be on the look out for turtles with notches carved on the margins of their shells. These turtles may have already been rescued once from the trade by forest protection rangers, and released at National Parks and Protected Areas in Vietnam, as part of the TCEP's "Second Chance" Program. Releases have been carried out for *Indotestudo elongata*, *Manouria impressa*, and *Pyxidea mouhotii* at Cat Tien National Park, Pu Mat Nature Reserve, and Cuc Phuong National Park respectively.

ATTENTION!!! If turtles with notches are observed in the trade, please contact the TCEP at 03-084-8004.

Notches carved on the outer edge of each turtle's shell identify the turtle by number, corresponding with records and photographs at the TCEP.

Don't Be Fooled

Be wary of traders claiming that the turtles they possess are raised on farms.

Wildlife traders are often in possession of papers showing that some or all of the animals that they possess were raised on farms, and therefore not illegally exploited from the wild. While there have been successful advances in the domestic rearing of certain species of wildlife, such as crocodiles, traders often attempt to circumvent the law by claiming that animals that they have illegally obtained are "farmed species", and are therefore legal to trade. This is particularly true in the case of hard-shelled turtles, where growth requires many years of investment into feeding and care before the turtles reach a reasonable weight to sell.

Based on current market prices, and the long-term investment required for a turtle to reach a sellable size, hard-shelled turtles observed in the trade are with few exceptions, harvested illegally from the wild.

Note: A "farmed species" by definition must be born and bred from parents in captivity.

Clever Traders Forever Changing their Tricks

Protecting Vietnam's wildlife is not an easy task for the nation's rangers. Once animals enter the trade from the wild, authorities must rely on solid information from concerned citizens and informants in order to catch traders as they try to move their illegal cargos north. Like drug traffickers, traders are always changing their routes and inventing new ways to avoid inspection, so that they can reap the lucrative profits that await them in Chinese markets.

The following section includes feedback from rangers working the front lines of wildlife protection:

- r Nghe An rangers report tanker trucks coming in from Laos with wildlife smuggled inside the tank and utility boxes on and underneath the truck.
- r Thanh Hoa rangers discovered sacks of turtles hidden under fish packed in ice on a frozen foods truck out of Ho Chi Minh City.
- r Ninh Binh rangers recently checking the roof on the top of a bus discovered 18 pangolins and 14 cobras in sacks hidden beneath a well-camouflaged false roof.
- r Traders are reportedly using private cars and even mini-tourist vans to smuggle wildlife. Earlier this year two bears and a clouded leopard were discovered drugged with ketamine and hidden in the trunk of a trader's car.
- r Thanh Hoa rangers report that a well-known man from the south uses three refrigerator trucks he owns to ship wildlife cargos to the north. To avoid detection, he frequently changes the registration number on his truck to different provinces. He has reportedly been caught twice in Thanh Hoa and once in Ninh Binh.

The critically endangered "Golden Turtle" (*Cuora trifasciata*) in the hands of a trader. The TCEP has only seen three specimens of this rare species of turtle since 1996.

An adult *Pelochelys cantori* recovered from the trade by Ninh Binh rangers. This species, formerly *Pelochelys bibroni*, is one of two turtle species (excluding marine turtles) specifically protected under Vietnam's wildlife protection law. The other species is *Indotestudo elongata*.

Vietnam Turtle News

Turtle Field Records Needed

The TCEP has assembled a database of field records for turtles in Vietnam. Please help by forwarding any current records that you believe may be relevant to the TCEP. Valid field records include any observations of turtles in their natural habitat, and records pertaining to turtles observed in the possession/confiscated from hunters within the turtle's habitat (e.g. forest). Market and trade records can not be used.

An accurate description of the turtle will be necessary, along with the date, location, a brief description of the observation, and the name of the observing party. If possible, take a photograph of the turtle in the field.

Contact: cpcp@fpt.vn or post to TCEP, PO Box 222, Hanoi.

Recent Field Records for Vietnam (June – December 2000)

Amyda cartilaginea, Cat Tien National Park, Forest Protection Department, SA

Heosemys grandis, Cat Tien National Park, Ben Hayes, WWF, FR

Heosemys grandis, Cat Tien National Park, Forest Protection Department, SA

Pyxidea mouhotii, Cuc Phuong National Park, Rohan Holloway and Nguyen The Cuong, FR

Pyxidea mouhotii, Cuc Phuong National Park, Forest Protection Department, SA

Cuora amboinensis, U Minh Thuong Nature Reserve, Dr. Nguyen Van Sang, SA

Hieremys annandalii, U Minh Thuong Nature Reserve, Bryan Stuart, FR

Malayemys subtrijuga, U Minh Thuong Nature Reserve, Dr. Nguyen Van Sang and Bryan Stuart, FR/SA

SA: Source area record. Confiscated by rangers or in the possession of traders within the likely source area.

FR: Field records observed in the wild.

Special thanks to Gert Polet and the Cat Tien rangers for their reports from Cat Tien, as well as to Care International and the U Minh Thuong Nature Reserve for providing records of turtles caught during recent surveys at the reserve.

Above: *Amyda cartilaginea* confiscated by rangers from a fisherman at Cat Tien National Park.

Left: *Batagur baska*, photographed by Joe Walston of WCS last spring at a zoo along the coast of Cambodia (the turtle's origin is unknown). More recently, WCS biologists confirmed that *Batagur baska* continues to exist in a remote region of Cambodia.

Heosemys grandis photographed by Ben Hayes, WWF, at Cat Tien National Park. Two additional *Heosemys* were confiscated from hunters in November.

IUCN Red List 2000

According to the new IUCN Red List for 2000, all of Vietnam's tortoises and freshwater turtles are now to be regarded as "Threatened". While the 1996 Red List included only 13 threatened species native to Vietnam, international concern over the threat to Southeast Asian turtles resulting from trade and habitat loss has resulted in major changes in the conservation status of all of Vietnam's turtle species. According to the 2000 Red List, three species are now listed as "Critically Endangered", while 11 other species are listed as "Endangered", seven species as "Vulnerable", and two species are listed as "Lower Risk".

Table 1: Turtle Species in Vietnam

A complete list of Vietnam's native turtle species, including their conservation status and protection under CITES and Vietnam's Decree 18. ("Turtle Conservation and Ecology-Vietnam", Douglas Hendrie, 2000)

Platysternidae	Common Name	CITES	2000 IUCN RL	VN RB 1992	Decree 18
<i>Platysternon megacephalum</i>	Big-headed turtle		EN	R	
Emydidae					
<i>Cuora amboinensis</i>	Malayan box turtle	II	VU	VU	
<i>Cuora galbinifrons galbinifrons</i>	Indochinese box turtle	II	CR	VU	
<i>Cuora galbinifrons bouretti</i>	Indochinese box turtle	II	CR	VU	
<i>Cuora galbinifrons picturata</i>	Indochinese box turtle	II	CR	VU	
<i>Cuora trifasciata</i>	Chinese three-striped box turtle	II	EN	VU	
<i>Cyclemys pulchristriata</i>	Striped-necked leaf turtle		LR		
<i>Cyclemys tcheponensis</i>	Striped-necked leaf turtle		LR		
<i>Geoemyda spengleri</i>	Black-breasted leaf turtle		EN		
<i>Heosemys grandis</i>	Orange-headed temple turtle		VU	VU	
<i>Hieremys annandalii</i>	Yellow-headed temple turtle		EN	VU	
<i>Malayemys subtrijuga</i>	Malayan snail-eating turtle		VU		
<i>Mauremys annamensis</i>	Vietnamese leaf turtle		CR		
<i>Mauremys mutica</i>	Asian yellow pond turtle		EN		
<i>Ocadia sinensis</i>	Chinese striped-neck turtle		EN		
<i>Pyxidea mouhotii m.</i>	Keeled box turtle		EN		
<i>Pyxidea mouhotii obsti</i>	Keeled box turtle		EN		
<i>Sacalia quadriocellata</i>	Four-eyed turtle		EN		
<i>Siebenrockiella crassicolis</i>	Black marsh turtle		VU		
Testudinidae					
<i>Manouria impressa</i>	Impressed tortoise	II	VU	VU	
<i>Indotestudo elongata</i>	Elongated tortoise	II	EN	VU	II
Trionychidae					
<i>Amyda cartilaginea</i>	Asiatic softshell turtle		VU		
<i>Palea steindachneri</i>	Wattle-necked softshell turtle		EN		
<i>Pelochelys cantori</i>	Asian giant softshell turtle		EN	VU	II
<i>Pelodiscus sinensis</i>	Chinese softshell turtle		VU		
<i>Rafetus swinhoei</i>			CR		

(November 23, 2000)

VN RB: Vietnamese Red Data Book (1992)

Decree 18: Wildlife protection laws legal ban from commercial trade two species of turtles

Cyclemys atripons/pulchristriata, a native of Cuc Phuong National Park, first recorded in December 1999.

Geoemyda spengleri, a mountain forest-dwelling species native to Tam Dao National Park, and common in Hanoi pet markets.

Another common pet trade species, *Ocadia sinensis* is found in lowland marshes, ponds, and lakes.

Project News

TCEP Welcomes Australian Turtle Ecologist

The TCEP welcomes Rohan Holloway, an Australian turtle ecologist, who previously worked in Cambodia collecting data on the turtle trade. Rohan arrived in early September and assumed immediate responsibility for coordinating the captive rehabilitation and research components of the project, working with counterpart turtle ecologists Le Thien Duc and Nguyen The Cuong. Part of Rohan's main duties will also be to help train park staff to manage the day-to-day operations of the center, as well as to develop a translocation program that will permit turtles to be released back into the wild following rehabilitation. Rohan's arrival coincided with a significant increase in turtles confiscated from the trade by regional rangers, and much of his time has been involved in processing trade seizures. However, since Rohan's arrival, the TCEP has also been able to carry out two major translocations of turtles back into the wild, including *Indotestudo elongata* at Cat Tien National Park, and *Manouria impressa* at Pu Mat Nature Reserve.

Melbourne Zoo Visit

Special thanks to Matt Vincent of the Melbourne Zoo for his assistance on the project during a visit in November. Matt provided the TCEP with badly-needed incubation boxes, equipment, and supplies for hatching turtle eggs. Matt also helped out for a week, including getting his hands dirty processing 118 kg of *Indotestudo elongata* from a Thanh Hoa trade seizure.

Matt's trip to Vietnam followed a visit to the Kadoorie Farm and Botanical Garden in Hong Kong, and a brief tour of markets in southern China with Michael Lau, where Matt got a chance to see the end of the road for much of the region's wildlife.

In the coming year, Matt will play an increasingly important role in helping coordinate Melbourne Zoo's involvement with the TCEP.

TCEP Website now in Vietnamese

Jim Van Abbema, Le Duc Minh, and the New York Turtle and Tortoise Society have produced a Vietnamese language version of the Turtle Conservation and Ecology Project – Vietnam website. The website features a brief overview of the project, photo library, trade reports, and newsletters, and can be found at www.nytt.org/vietnam/

The Chinese softshell, *Pelodiscus sinensis*. Perhaps the only native species in Vietnam that has been farmed successfully. In contrast with other species, *Pelodiscus* grows and matures quickly, is easy to maintain, and will produce multiple clutches of eggs each year.

Below: A farm outside of Hanoi sells about 3000 hatchlings annually, and helps other farmers learn about softshell farming.

HELP!

The Turtle Conservation and Ecology Project presently holds nearly 800 turtles, representing 19 of 23 native species in Vietnam. An area of approximately 2,800 square meters is dedicated to holding facilities, including enclosures suitable for both aquatic and terrestrial turtles.

To help support our efforts, please contact us at:

cpcp@fpt.vn

The Turtle Conservation and Ecology Project: An Overview

The objective of the Turtle Conservation and Ecology Project is to initiate immediate and urgent action in response to the threat to Vietnam's 23 native turtle species resulting from illegal wildlife trade and loss of habitat. The project is working with national and regional authorities, as well as other institutions and organizations, to implement a strategy aimed at providing greater protection for Vietnam's turtles, as well as establishing and building long-term public interest in conservation of chelonians (turtles and tortoises).

The project involves seven main components:

- (1) Public awareness and education
- (2) Training and institutional capacity building of national protection authorities
- (3) Research on captive ecology and reproduction.
- (4) Translocation of turtles back into suitable habitat
- (5) Field research on the natural distribution and status of Vietnam's turtles
- (6) Investigation and monitoring of the wildlife trade
- (7) Building interest and expertise in turtles within national scientific institutions

The project is represented by a steering/advisory committee including the following specialist:

Chris Banks, Melbourne Zoo
Dave Collins, (AZA/CHAG)
Peter Paul van Dijk, TRAFFIC SEA
Rolland Wirth, Zoological Society for Conservation of Species and Pop.
Douglas Hendrie (FFI – Vietnam)

For more information, please contact us at:

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Cuc Phuong National Park, Ninh Binh Province, Vietnam
Email: cpcp@fpt.vn Tele. 030 848-004

Acknowledgments

The Turtle Conservation and Ecology Project has received support from the following institutions and individuals:

The Columbus Zoo (USA)
Melbourne Zoo (Australia)
American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA)
James Barzyk Fund (USA)
Rotterdam Zoo (Netherlands)
WVF (J. Paxton) Japan
Humane Society International (HSI)
DBH Fund (USA)
WWF Sweden
Allwetterzoo Muenster
Auckland Zoo (NZ)
SOPTOM (France)
Kadoorie Farm & Botanical Garden (HK)
Partidge Films

The project would also like to acknowledge the support and assistance from the following other individuals:

Dr. Nguyen Ba Thu, Director, National FPD
Mr. Nguyen Quang Rong, Director, Ninh Binh Provincial FPD
Mr. Hoang Cao Trai, Director, Thanh Hoa Provincial FPD
Mr. Nguyen Van Oanh, Director, Hanoi FPB
Mr. Pham Nhu Bich, Director, Soc Son Rescue Center
Dao Van Khuong, Director, Cuc Phuong National Park

Dr. Peter Pritchard, Chelonian Research Institute
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Jim van Abbema, New York Turtle and Tortoise Society
Dr. Charles Innis, Veterinarian
Bryan Stuart, WCS Lao PDR
Edgar Lehr, Scientific Institute for Nature Research
Dave Lee, The Tortoise Reserve
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William Espenshade, Philadelphia Zoo
Matt Vincent, Melbourne Zoo
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