

www.YearoftheTurtle.org

# Year of the Turtle News

No. 2

February 2011

Basking in the Wonder of Turtles



*This young Burmese roof turtle is one of over 400 now living at the Yadanabon Zoo, the result of protecting nesting beaches of the remnant wild population and captive breeding. This rare turtle was considered possibly extinct until it was "rediscovered" in 2002. Thanks to TSA efforts, this species is on the road to recovery.*



## What is PARC?

Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC) is:

- a diverse group of conservation-minded citizens, professionals, and organizations
- intended to connect and complement existing conservation efforts
- focused on keeping common species common and protecting habitats
- You!

The PARC Mission: To conserve amphibians, reptiles and their habitats as integral parts of our ecosystem and culture through proactive and coordinated public/private partnerships.

Read more about PARC at [www.parcplace.org](http://www.parcplace.org), and be sure to read the "10 Years of PARC" brochure for a great overview of the organization: <http://www.parcplace.org/documents/PARC10year.pdf>.

## The Turtle Survival Alliance

The Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA) was formed in 2001 as "an IUCN partnership for sustainable captive management of freshwater turtles and tortoises." The TSA arose in response to the rampant and unsustainable harvest of Asian turtle populations to supply Chinese markets, a situation known as the Asian Turtle Crisis. Recognizing that some species of turtles and tortoises were unlikely to survive without well-managed

populations, the TSA was charged with developing breeding programs for the most critically endangered of the world's chelonian species.

For seven years, the TSA functioned within the IUCN (World Conservation Union) structure, recognized as a task force of the Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group (TFTSG). With branches in Europe and the U.S., the TSA organized a diverse partnership involving zoos and aquariums, universities, private breeders and serious hobbyists, veterinarians, conservation NGOs, range country turtle facilities and turtle rescue organizations. That diversity is one of the TSA's core strengths and has allowed the development of a global network of linked breeding programs, known as Assurance Colonies. The TSA has attained recognition for its

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**"Behold the turtle. He makes progress when his neck is out."** — James Bryant Conant (1893-1978), educator and scientist

## Why Care About Turtles?

Key reasons to care about turtles include:

- Ethics
- Aesthetics
- Ecosystem Services

Turtles and tortoises are unique animals, iconic throughout world cultures as symbols of wisdom and steadfast qualities, and globally recognized by their shells. They have persisted on Earth for over 200 million years and through many world disturbance events. Their precipitous losses now are indicative of the threat that humans are having to world ecosystems, where our natural heritage is being lost. Biodiversity retention has ethical and aesthetic rationales.

The USA has more turtle and tortoise species than any other nation. We are a turtle biodiversity hotspot. Retaining this natural heritage is synonymous with ecosystem stewardship and maintenance of healthy waters and lands.

Ecologically, turtles are centrally nested in food webs, tying together producer and consumer components of the food chain. Their loss rearranges predator-prey food chains, altering native wild communities.

Turtles are important commercial products in many world cultures, providing food, traditional medicines, and pets. They can be effectively and humanely farmed, which can reduce losses of wild turtles.



*Northern Diamondback Terrapin, (Malaclemys terrapin terrapin). Photo by Kevin Plitt.*

## Get Your February Calendar!



Reinier Goudswaard photographed this Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys picta*) swimming in a large pond upstream from a cascade near Otter Lake along the Blue Ridge Parkway in Virginia in July 2010. See this month's winner (above) and runner-up at [www.parcplace.org/YOTYearoftheTurtleCalendarFebruary.pdf](http://www.parcplace.org/YOTYearoftheTurtleCalendarFebruary.pdf)

### Call for Photos for the 2011 Year of the Turtle Calendar Photo Contest

It's not too late to enter the 2011 Calendar Photo Contest! We are accepting entries all year long. Give us your best shot! For more information and for entry details, please visit [www.parcplace.org/yearoftheturtlephoto.htm](http://www.parcplace.org/yearoftheturtlephoto.htm).



Follow all of the Year of the Turtle news and happenings on

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Year-of-the-Turtle-2011/158410367533653>)

and Twitter (<http://twitter.com/YearOfTheTurtle>).

facebook

## Submit Your Citizen Science Projects

Do you have a list of turtle citizen science projects? Are you involved with a specific citizen program or have information on a project? Other turtle enthusiasts would love to hear about it in order to get involved as well! One great example is the work of the Toronto Zoo's Turtle Tally ([www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/TurtleTally.asp](http://www.torontozoo.com/adoptapond/TurtleTally.asp)). Please send information on your citizen science programs to [yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com](mailto:yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com) and help us get more citizens involved in turtle science!

## Ask the Experts!

Do you have questions about turtle biology or turtle conservation issues, but you can't quite seem to find the answers? Submit your turtle questions via email ([yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com](mailto:yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com)) to our panel of experts, and we will select questions to answer in our upcoming newsletter editions. Please include your name and location in your email message.

## Get Involved in the Year of the Turtle!

The Year of the Turtle Team is encouraging partnerships for Year of the Turtle! By getting involved with Year of the Turtle, you can help us achieve a heightened awareness of turtle concerns and ongoing efforts.

There are several benefits to you and your group by getting involved:

**1.** We will feature a brief introduction to your group with your logo and website, as space permits, in the Year of the Turtle News as well as on the Year of the Turtle website. Send your information to [yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com](mailto:yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com) to become a partner today!

**2.** If you would like to write a longer article about a particular project your group is conducting, we may be able to include that as a feature

in a future newsletter. Please contact David Dimitrie, our newsletter editor, at [yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com](mailto:yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com) for article contents and length guidelines; articles to be included are determined by the 15th of the previous month. Be sure to send photos to accompany your articles!

**3.** We will post your logo and web link at the Year of the Turtle website, and similarly, we will give you our logo and web link to place on your website.

Another way you can get involved is to help us with our Turtle Mapping Project. Go to [www.yearoftheturtle.org](http://www.yearoftheturtle.org) for more information.

Finally, we encourage everyone to think of how they or their group might promote turtle conservation

this year. If you have ideas, please forge right ahead and do not hesitate to tie your efforts to Year of the Turtle! We have had some very creative and beneficial suggestions such as taking turtle conservation concepts to local communities through arts or humanities expositions and including the Year of the Turtle logos in everyday events; having turtle biology or conservation talks showcased at local and national meetings or festivals; and developing media “splashes” such as films, YouTube videos, billboards, and spokespersons.

We are very excited to extend the Year of the Turtle to a broader audience through your participation!

Get involved today!

## Year of the Turtle Collaborating Partners

The Year of the Turtle Planning Team is pleased to welcome the following organizations to our growing list of collaborating partners:

**American Tortoise Rescue** was founded to provide for the protection of all species of tortoise and turtle. We offer permanent sanctuary to abandoned and lost tortoises. We also provide information about the care, feeding, and rehabilitation of endangered and captive-bred tortoises. We also work to protect the desert tortoise from collectors, off-road vehicles, and loss of habitat. American Tortoise Rescue has sponsored World Turtle Day on May 23 since it was created in 2000.

[www.tortoise.com](http://www.tortoise.com)



**Australian Freshwater Turtle Conservation and Research Association (AFTCRA), Inc.**'s mission is to protect all Australian Freshwater Turtle species and to prevent extinction by ensuring sustainable populations can and do exist in the wild. Our current activities are conducting field research and promoting awareness through education. We intend to establish an education centre plus establish assurance colonies and breeding programs of threatened species. We also hope to be able to fund small research projects in collaboration with Australian universities. [www.aftcra.org.au](http://www.aftcra.org.au)

**Australian Freshwater Turtles Forum** is a not-for-profit organisation with over 4,500 members dedicated not only to educating people with the most up to date freshwater turtle husbandry to provide a happy and rewarding life for turtles bred and kept in captivity, but also the preservation and conservation of freshwater turtles throughout the world. Our members have organised and participated in many rescues of freshwater turtles around Australia that have been put in danger by human activities and changing climatic conditions.

[www.turtles.net.au](http://www.turtles.net.au)



## More Year of the Turtle Collaborating Partners

**Colorado Reptile Humane Society** works to improve the lives of reptiles and amphibians in captivity and in the wild through education and action. We accomplish our mission by providing shelter and proper husbandry while securing permanent homes for the animals; providing captive care education to the public; participating in conservation efforts locally and internationally; and engaging in rehabilitation and release of native species. Our annual event is The Reptile Experience, and we will be using the Year of the Turtle as our theme this year.

[www.corhs.org](http://www.corhs.org)



**DFW Turtle & Tortoise Club** was created to exchange ideas and information in order to create a better understanding of the care of turtles and tortoises with a focus, though not exclusively, in the Dallas – Fort Worth, Texas area. [www.dfwttc.org](http://www.dfwttc.org)

**The Eastern Box Turtle Conservation Trust** was founded in 1993 with the aim of developing and testing potential strategies that might enable the rebuilding of extirpated or decimated box turtle populations. Our mission is “to enhance turtle conservation, native population recruitment and repatriation, in order to improve the declining prospects of turtle species, particularly of the Eastern Box turtle (*Terrapene carolina*) in Northwestern Pennsylvania.” [www.ebtct.org](http://www.ebtct.org)



**Jenkinson's Aquarium** is dedicated to conservation and educating the public on marine life conservation. We strive to provide our guests with a unique and memorable experience through creative exhibits and innovative education programs. Our exhibits are designed to promote awareness of animals and their habitats and inspire an appreciation of wildlife. This connection with wildlife helps to ensure preservation of species and habitats. [www.jenkinsons.com/aquarium](http://www.jenkinsons.com/aquarium)

**Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy** is dedicated to promoting the preservation and proliferation of healthy wildlife habitats in Loudoun County, Virginia. We hold over 100 free programs and field trips annually, lead a summer nature camp, engage residents in environmental monitoring programs (Stream Monitoring, Amphibian Monitoring, Bluebird Nestbox Monitoring, Bird Surveys, Butterfly count), and execute 2-3 major habitat restoration events each year. [www.loudounwildlife.org](http://www.loudounwildlife.org)



**Piedmont Wildlife Rehab, Inc.** sympathizes with humans uncomfortable with wildlife situations and focuses on helping people as well as injured and orphaned wildlife with the goal of nurturing an appreciation for our local wildlife and environment through education and experience with animals. [www.piedmontwildliferehab.org](http://www.piedmontwildliferehab.org)

**Texas Herp Naturalists** aims to advance appreciation of herpetofauna and other wildlife and wild places in Texas, understanding of natural history and biological concepts, and support for conservation of plant and animal communities in Texas. Texas Herp Naturalists is a project of Michael Smith and Clint King, consisting of a website and a quarterly e-publication, Texas Field Notes, distributed free to subscribers. [www.texasherp.org](http://www.texasherp.org)



## More Year of the Turtle Collaborating Partners



**The Turtle Conservation & Research Programme (TCRP)** is a scientific society dedicated to safeguarding freshwater turtle species in northeast India. The TCRP seeks global input for local solutions to saving endangered turtles. Since its inception in 2009, the TCRP has initiated a freshwater turtle conservation program in the state of Assam and has started a community awareness and capacity building project for safeguarding the region's turtle. [tcrpnortheast.wikispaces.com](http://tcrpnortheast.wikispaces.com)

**The Walter L. Stasavich Science & Nature Center** is located at River Park North in Greenville, North Carolina. The Science and Nature Center is an educational hub, home to an exhibit area that includes a 10,000 gallon freshwater aquarium, a live snapping turtle tank, a "Turtle Touch" tank, two wildlife dioramas, an interactive frog and toad identification computer game, five snake habitats, and more.

[www.greenvillenc.gov](http://www.greenvillenc.gov)



Our full list of partners can be found at [www.yearoftheturtle.org](http://www.yearoftheturtle.org).

## Turtles in the News

The Gazette Times of Corvallis, Oregon highlights the efforts of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Gulf states, local fishermen, and many nonprofit partners in sea turtle aid in the aftermath of the 2010 BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. More than 400 sea turtles were rescued and rehabilitated (with greater than 96% of these individuals surviving), over 25,000 sea turtle eggs were moved to avoid oiled waters, and oil spill monitoring efforts identified the additional problem of turtles drowning in fishing gear. Read the full story at:

[www.gazettetimes.com/news/opinion/columnists/article\\_52e11592-16fe-11e0-98e9-001cc4c03286.html](http://www.gazettetimes.com/news/opinion/columnists/article_52e11592-16fe-11e0-98e9-001cc4c03286.html)

Some of the desert tortoises moved to make way for a solar energy plant in the Mojave Desert appear to have contracted an infectious upper respiratory disease. Read the full story from the Press-Enterprise of Riverside, California at:

[www.pe.com/localnews/stories/PE\\_News\\_Local\\_D\\_tortoise05.405081d.html](http://www.pe.com/localnews/stories/PE_News_Local_D_tortoise05.405081d.html)

Two men from Japan were recently arrested at Los Angeles International Airport amid accusations of an attempt to smuggle 55 live turtles and tortoises into the United States. Read the Los Angeles Times story at:

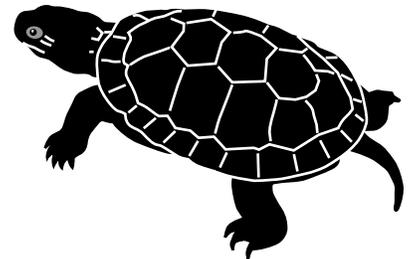
[www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-0111-turtle-smuggle-20110111,0,6789292.story](http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-0111-turtle-smuggle-20110111,0,6789292.story)

Vietnam's only living animal deity could be in mortal danger, as new wounds open old fears about the survival of the legendary Hoan Kiem Lake Turtle. Read the full story from Thanh Nien News at: [www.thanhniennews.com/2010/Pages/20110108115744.aspx](http://www.thanhniennews.com/2010/Pages/20110108115744.aspx)

If you have items you would like to contribute to Turtles in the News, please send them for consideration to [yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com](mailto:yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com).

## Submit Your Turtle Art, Stories, and Poetry

Do you have turtle art, stories, or poetry that could be highlighted during the Year of the Turtle? Submit your turtle art (in jpg, tiff, or pdf format) and copies of your stories and poems via email to [yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com](mailto:yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com). We will be including submissions in upcoming newsletters and in other Year of the Turtle materials and outreach efforts throughout 2011, and we want your work to be part of it!



**Turtle Survival Alliance, cont. from p.1**

ability to build partnerships with government regulatory authorities and to help move otherwise doomed, illegally traded, and confiscated turtles and tortoises into programs designed to prevent their extinction. Assurance Colonies are organized both in situ (in the range country) or ex situ (outside the range country) and are crucial to preventing the extinction of many species, some of which have already been lost in nature. In 2005, the TSA sought non-profit status to allow more effective handling of finances and created the TSA Foundation, 501(c)(3) registered in the state of Texas.



*Rupali Ghosh with an old male Batagur baska from a village pond in Bangladesh. The owner had the terrapin for more than 50 years.*

Today, the organization's niche is working in range countries where endangered chelonian species occur, developing the capacity for turtle conservation through training and capacity building, and generally emphasizing programs with a captive component (headstarting, captive breeding, and rescue). The TSA operates under a singular, overarching commitment: zero turtle extinctions in the 21st century. Since forming, the TSA has become recognized as a global force for turtle conservation, capable of taking swift and decisive action on behalf of critically endangered chelonians.

*With 28 species, 7 of them endemic, Myanmar (formerly Burma) is a turtle diversity hotspot. However, Chinese markets are depleting many populations and at least five are considered critically endangered. One of these - the Burmese star tortoise - is functionally extinct in nature and depends on captive breeding for survival. The TSA has built or renovated three breeding facilities designed to build up captive stocks and provide options for future recovery. Lei Lei Khaing is shown here with some of her charges at Lawkananda Park.*



Although the TSA was organized in response to the Asian Turtle Crisis, the group is well positioned to respond to other endangered turtle species, particularly where a managed breeding component is included in their overall survival strategy. While the turtle extinction crisis remains most acute in Southeast Asia, the situation is actually global in scope. In recent years, the number of turtle species added to the IUCN Red List as Endangered has more than doubled, and that number will continue to grow as the Red Listing process is applied to species in Africa and South America.

The TSA focuses on critically endangered species and employs a two-pronged approach to prevent extinction and promote recovery. The organization works in range countries - especially those considered to be turtle diversity hotspots - to support field research and conservation programs while at the same time securing the species in captivity as a guard against extinction in the wild. The TSA also develops captive breeding programs outside the range countries as an extra measure of protection against extinction. Today, the TSA supports and manages recovery programs for endangered

turtles and tortoises around the world. The model is successful because of partnerships, and the TSA strongly believes in building capacity for saving turtles in the countries where they live. They identify individuals and facilities that are already involved in turtle conservation and work to help them get better at what they do because in the end, the battle to save species will be won or lost in the countries where they live.

### **A Sampling of the TSA's Programs**

**China** - In China, the TSA has been working since 2007 to breed the last known female Yangtze Giant Softshell Turtle (*Rafetus swinhoei*) in existence. After extensive negotiations, the TSA spearheaded the move of the female to the Suzhou Zoo, where she has been paired with the last known male in China. The TSA has provided nutritional and husbandry expertise, as well as exhibit improvements, in an attempt to increase the chances of successfully reproducing this rarest of turtles. [www.turtlesurvival.org/component/taxonomy/term/summary/18/45](http://www.turtlesurvival.org/component/taxonomy/term/summary/18/45)

**Myanmar** - With 28 species (including seven that are endemic,

or found nowhere else on Earth) Myanmar is a turtle diversity hotspot and is currently considered “ground zero” for the Asian turtle crisis. Working in conjunction with the Wildlife Conservation Society, the TSA works to implement recovery programs for some highly endangered endemic species, while also coordinating a comprehensive and humane response to the thousands of smuggled turtles that are confiscated each year on their way to China. Multiple captive breeding and rescue centers are currently being built or planned that will secure the future for turtles saved from the illegal trade. A new Turtle Conservation Coordinator has been hired on a full-time basis to coordinate the TSA’s multi-faceted programs in Myanmar and will begin work in mid-January 2011. [www.turtlesurvival.org/component/taxonomy/term/summary/23/45](http://www.turtlesurvival.org/component/taxonomy/term/summary/23/45)



To ensure the survival of the critically endangered Red-crowned roof turtle in India, the TSA funds the protection of the nests on the Chambal River where as few as 400 females may remain. Many juveniles are then raised in headstarting facilities and later released when they are large enough to stand a better chance of survival.

**India** - The TSA India program is managed by Indian biologists that seek local solutions to saving turtles including converting former poachers and providing alternative income sources. The focal point of this comprehensive program is the iconic and critically endangered red-crowned roof turtle. Multiple species

initiatives are also underway for the Sunderbans Batagur, narrow-headed softshell turtle, Leith’s softshell turtle and the crowned river turtle. Large-scale illegal collecting for Asian markets threatens the survival of many of India’s turtles, and the TSA India program may be their only hope for the future. [www.turtlesurvival.org/component/taxonomy/term/summary/19/45](http://www.turtlesurvival.org/component/taxonomy/term/summary/19/45)



TSA funded surveys in 2010 documented the continued decline of the Central American River turtle, locally known as the Hicatee, and unless better protective measures can be implemented, this species is likely headed for extinction in Belize, currently the species’ stronghold. The TSA is raising funds to support a comprehensive recovery program that will halt this species downward spiral.

**Belize** – TSA conducted surveys recently that documented the continued and steady decline of the Central American river turtle, locally known as the Hickatee. A TSA sponsored workshop led to the development of a Hickatee Conservation Monitoring Network that is mobilizing to prevent the gradual extinction of this unique turtle. A media campaign will soon be launched, and training workshops aimed at building capacity among the conservation NGO community in Belize to continue survey and monitoring work. A pilot husbandry program to test the feasibility of breeding and rearing Hickatee in captivity is also in the planning stages. [www.turtlesurvival.org/component/taxonomy/term/summary/115/45](http://www.turtlesurvival.org/component/taxonomy/term/summary/115/45)

**Bangladesh** – The TSA began working in Bangladesh more extensively in recent months, working to save the last remnants of the Sunderbans river terrapin – a species that is recognized as one of the most threatened of Asia’s large river turtles. Working with the Bangladesh Forest Department and the NGO CARINAM, TSA biologists have literally been plying markets and backyard ponds to acquire specimens for a captive breeding program. [www.turtlesurvival.org/component/taxonomy/term/summary/119/45](http://www.turtlesurvival.org/component/taxonomy/term/summary/119/45)



Madagascar’s four species of tortoises currently face unprecedented threats to their survival due to uncontrolled poaching for international black markets or for food. To better confront these daunting challenges the TSA hired Herilala Randriamahazo to coordinate efforts there to develop strategies to protect remaining wild populations.

**Madagascar** - With five endemic species – four of them tortoises – Madagascar is considered a tortoise diversity hotspot. Unfortunately, all of these species were recently ranked Critically Endangered by the IUCN Red List, due primarily to unregulated collecting for food and the black market pet trade. The TSA has been working in Madagascar for many years and fortified its commitment to this region last year by hiring a full-time Malagasy Tortoise Conservation Coordinator to coordinate all of its field programs. A top priority will be to increase protection to Radiated tortoise populations that are currently

*TSA, continued*

undergoing catastrophic declines due to poaching. [www.turtlesurvival.org/component/taxonomy/term/summary/21/45](http://www.turtlesurvival.org/component/taxonomy/term/summary/21/45)

**Animal Management** - Building self-sustaining captive populations of targeted critically endangered chelonian species is fundamental to the TSA's mission, and one of foundations that the organization was built upon. A Director of Animal Management was hired in 2010 to help the TSA achieve its goal of developing captive populations to save species from extinction. The TSA's estimated current holdings consist of 1730 specimens representing 35 species, many of which are Critically Endangered or Endangered. Maintaining captive assurance colonies may be their last hope of survival. Caring for this valuable collection are 95 private individuals, 37 zoos and aquaria, and

four institutions, totally representing 136 individuals and institutions dedicated to conserving the world's tortoises and freshwater turtles.

For more information on TSA programs, please visit [www.turtlesurvival.org/projects/by-country](http://www.turtlesurvival.org/projects/by-country)

The TSA is also pleased to announce a "Call for Sessions" for their 9th Annual Symposium on the Conservation and Biology of Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles, being held August 14-17, 2011 in Orlando, Florida. To download the official "Call for Sessions" please visit [www.turtlesurvival.org/storage/documents/2011-Conference/Call\\_for\\_Sessions-Workshop\\_01-11-11.pdf](http://www.turtlesurvival.org/storage/documents/2011-Conference/Call_for_Sessions-Workshop_01-11-11.pdf).

More information on the 9th Annual Symposium can be found at [www.turtlesurvival.org/get-involved/2011-conference](http://www.turtlesurvival.org/get-involved/2011-conference).

## Recent Publication: Aquatic Turtle Assemblage in Missouri

A recent study, published in the Journal of Fish and Wildlife Management, provides a review of the aquatic turtle assemblage in southeast Missouri. The publication reports the findings of a mark-recapture study at a lake and adjacent borrow pit in a relict tract of bottomland hardwood forest in the Mississippi River floodplain in southeast Missouri. The full review is available at [www.fwspubs.org/doi/pdf/10.3996/072010-JFWM-020](http://www.fwspubs.org/doi/pdf/10.3996/072010-JFWM-020)

Article Citation:

Glorioso, B. M., A. J. Vaughn, and J. H. Waddle. 2010. The aquatic turtle assemblage inhabiting a highly altered landscape in southeast Missouri. *Journal of Fish and Wildlife Management* 1:161-168. doi: 10.3996/072010-JFWM-020

## California Sanctuary to Sponsor 11th World Turtle Day

In honor of one of the world's oldest creatures, American Tortoise Rescue (ATR) is sponsoring its 11th annual World Turtle Day on May 23rd. Featured in Chase's Book of Annual Events, this day was created as an annual observance to help people celebrate and protect turtles and tortoises and their disappearing habitats around the world. ATR, a nonprofit organization based in Malibu, California, was established in 1990 for the protection of all species of tortoises and turtles. Susan Tellem and Marshall Thompson, founders of ATR, advocate humane treatment of all animals, including reptiles. Since 1990, ATR has placed about 3,000 tortoises and turtles in caring homes. ATR also assists law enforcement



when undersize or endangered turtles are confiscated, and they provide helpful information and referrals to persons with sick, neglected or abandoned turtles.

World Turtle Day was started to bring attention to, and to increase respect for and knowledge of, turtles and tortoises. "These gentle animals have been around for about 200 million years, yet they are rapidly disappearing," says Tellem. "We are seeing smaller turtles coming into the Rescue, meaning that older adults are disappearing from the wild, and the

breeding stock is drastically reduced. It is a very sad time for turtles and tortoises of the world."

Tellem and Thompson recommend that turtle enthusiasts do their part to help to save turtles and tortoises for future generations, and they hope World Turtle Day will continue to aid in increasing awareness of the conservation issues surrounding turtles. ATR encourages you to join them in celebrating World Turtle Day on May 23rd. For answers to questions and other information visit ATR online at [www.tortoise.com](http://www.tortoise.com) or send an e-mail to [info@tortoise.com](mailto:info@tortoise.com). You can also follow ATR on Twitter (@tortoiserescue) and on Facebook (American Tortoise Rescue).

# Education Spotlight: Turtles and Conservation Biology at Jane Goodall Environmental Middle School

by Keara Gann, Research Project Coordinator

Western pond turtles have been viewed as cute and compelling science teachers to many 8th graders at the Jane Goodall Environmental Middle School (JGEMS) in Salem, Oregon. For 10 years, JGEMS students have performed research projects as part of their Conservation Biology curriculum. Students first form groups of interest before embarking upon a year-long project. For 8th graders, turtles often are at the top of their list of interests.



Last year, one group studied western pond turtle habitat at Luckiamute State Natural Area. They focused on the nesting habitat surrounding the two main ponds, looking at grass height, ground cover percent, canopy cover, and other measurements. Students also estimated the potential amount of aquatic and overwintering habitat and spent time observing the resident turtles.

The students weren't content with merely quantifying but wanted to help the turtles as well. At the end of the school year they performed a service project at the site, placing a basking structure in the western pond and planting willows in the area. This year a research group is continuing the Luckiamute study with an added

predator assessment.

As an environmentally focused charter school, JGEMS emphasizes environmental awareness and stewardship, providing a large variety of field experiences that supplement traditional classroom lessons. Turtles were one of six animals and/or habitats studied by student groups this year.

In order for research projects to be a success, JGEMS partners with various organizations to assist with project design and data collection. For the last two years, JGEMS has worked closely with David Vesely of Oregon Wildlife Institute, who accompanied the students on many of the turtle data collection trips last year. Vesely demonstrated proper survey techniques, as well as provided information, assistance and supervision. Ryan Sparks, Luckiamute State Natural Area Park Manager, and Karen Hans, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) Fish Biologist, have also been integral to the success of the research projects.



Near the end of the school year, each research group presents their findings to a panel of scientists. All of their data is available to the public and is often used by organizations such as the ODFW and the US Forest



Service. The goal of these research projects is to connect students with local scientists and perform real, meaningful research to show them that at any time in your life, at any age, you can make a difference in the scientific community and spread awareness about environmental issues that are important to you. With the support of local scientific organizations, JGEMS will continue to spread this message and further turtle-related student research.

For more information, please contact: Keara Gann (kearagann(at)gmail.com), Research Project Coordinator

Marie Carver (CARVER\_MARIE(at)salkeiz.k12.or.us), Co-Director of JGEMS and lead Conservation Biology teacher.

## Are You an Educator or Interpretive Naturalist?

We want to continue to build on our collection of Year of the Turtle resources for teachers and naturalists like those at Jane Goodall Environmental Middle School! If you are willing to share, please send your unit materials, educational program information, or PowerPoint presentations to [yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com](mailto:yearoftheturtle2011@gmail.com). Please include your name, the name of your school/nature center or organization, and location. If you did not create the materials, please be sure to tell us where you found the materials.

# Turtles in the Oneida Indian Culture



By Dale Rood, Oneida Nation Turtle Clan Council Member

The “True Spirit of Thanksgiving,” the inaugural float sponsored by an American Indian nation in the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade’s® history, is a retelling of the Oneida’s Creation Story, depicting a giant turtle representing Turtle Island or Mother Earth. Turtle’s significance to the Oneida starts in our Creation Story. In our ancient oral tradition, Oneidas expressed their understanding of how they came to be in the world. The following excerpt is one rendition of our creation:

*In the beginning, this place was only darkness and water until the time when a woman fell from the sky world. Water creatures dwelling here, concerned for the woman’s safety, created this land as a platform for the woman with turtle agreeing to hold the land upon his back, which became known as Mother Earth.*

Mother Earth is also referred to as Turtle Island in Oneida and the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) tradition. Another version of the Creation Story expands upon the above formation of earth:

*The water animals summoned a great turtle and patted the earth upon its back for Sky Woman. At once the turtle grew and grew, as did the amount of earth. This earth became North America, a great island, Turtle Island.*

Within the Oneida Nation, the people are born into one of three clans—turtle, bear or wolf—determined matrilineally. Each clan bears its own characteristics. Turtles are known to teach patience and the importance of determination, as well as personifying strength and solidarity, age and wisdom. Turtles are well respected. The legend of how clans were chosen is believed to have its origins in the Haudenosaunee mourning process:

*Long ago, the entire village used to mourn the death of a family member.*

*Ceremonies and other important decisions were put off to mourn the death of a village member. The custom to postpone important decisions for the village caused problems for the village as regular business matters were*



*set aside. For a long while, the village could not find a way that allowed the village to mourn the death of a village member as is custom, and continue with the village’s day to day matters. The leaders of the village were at an impasse.*

*One day a young man of the village decided he would approach the leaders and offer his solution to the village’s problem. He proposed to the leaders to send the eldest women of the village down to the river to spend the night. The young man said to the leaders, “Ask those women to make a fire near the river and spend the night. Ask them that at first light the following morning, pray to the creator and afterward to take notice of the first animal that comes to the river. Once this happens, ask the women to return to the village and tell you what they saw.”*

*The women returned from the river later the following morning. They met with the leaders and they were asked to tell what they had seen. The first woman said she saw a TURTLE at the edge of the river. The second woman said she saw a WOLF running along the river. The third woman said she saw a BEAR feeding in the river on the rocks.*

*The leaders then appointed the Turtle, Wolf and Bear Clans to each family via the women, and it was decided that the family clan would pass through the mother from generation to generation as they have the Creator’s gift to*

*Turtles in Oneida Indian Culture, continued from p. 10*

*create life. Now, with the clans established, when one clan had a death in the family, one of the remaining clans would console the grieving clan, leaving the other clan to attend to the village's ceremonies and important day-to-day business.*

Clan members choose leaders to represent them on the Oneida Council, the Nation's governmental body, which makes decisions for the present while bearing in mind the impact upon the seventh generation to come.

## PARC Regional Working Group Spotlight: Blanding's Turtle Conservation Highlights the 2010 Midwest PARC Annual Meeting

The 2010 Midwest PARC (MWPARC) Annual Meeting was held in August at the Northern Illinois University Lorado Taft Field Campus and focused on the biology, conservation, and management of Blanding's Turtles (*Emydoidea blandingii*). The Blanding's Turtle is a medium-sized freshwater turtle documented from 10 of the 14 states within the Midwest United States. A species ranking exercise placed the Blanding's Turtle in the highest category of the 164 species of herpetofauna native to the Midwest, due to the majority of its range occurring within the Midwest and most states listing the species as endangered, threatened, special concern, or a species of greatest conservation need. A highlight of the Annual Meeting was the presentation of the results of the Blanding's Turtle Conservation Assessment Survey (available at [www.mwparc.org/products/blandings/Blandings\\_Turtle\\_Conservation\\_Assessment\\_2010\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.mwparc.org/products/blandings/Blandings_Turtle_Conservation_Assessment_2010_FINAL.pdf)).



Additionally, four task teams were formed to address issues related to the conservation of Blanding's Turtles. The overall goal of these task teams will be to address issues brought forward during the Annual Meeting, and their principle output will be products that will add significantly to the Conservation Assessment Survey. The task teams and their respective goals are:

1. Blanding's Turtle Distribution Mapping: Develop current distribution maps for the Midwest with township-level distribution.
2. Best Blanding's Turtle Populations: Identify what each state considers their "best" population.
3. Blanding's Turtle Core Areas: Develop a white paper on the core areas used by Blanding's Turtles throughout their range.
4. Habitat Management, Surveying, and Monitoring for Blanding's Turtles: Develop a document with recommendations for land-managers and those tasked with surveying and monitoring populations.

Be sure to check the MWPARC website ([www.mwparc.org](http://www.mwparc.org)) for future updates on these task teams as well as other recent MWPARC products ([www.mwparc.org/products](http://www.mwparc.org/products)), including a focus on raccoons and turtle conservation. More information on the results of the 2010 MWPARC Annual Meeting may be found at [www.mwparc.org/meetings/2010](http://www.mwparc.org/meetings/2010).

## Upcoming Meetings and Events

**The Wildlife Society, Western Section Annual Conference.**  
February 8-11, Riverside, California.

**Southeast PARC Annual Meeting,** “Reptile and Amphibian Conservation Southern Style”  
February 17-20 at Lake Tiak O’Khata, Louisville, Mississippi.

**The Desert Tortoise Council 36th Annual Meeting and Symposium.**  
February 18-20, Las Vegas, Nevada.

**76th North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference.**  
March 14-19, Kansas City, Missouri.

**Association of Zoos and Aquariums Mid-Year Meeting.** March 19-24,  
Chattanooga, Tennessee.

**Northwest PARC Annual Meeting.**  
March 21-22 in Gig Harbor, Washington.

**Rare Pond Species Survey Techniques Workshop,** April 2-3,  
Rohnert Park, California.

**North Carolina PARC Annual Meeting, with NC Chapter, The Wildlife Society.** April 5-7,  
Junaluska, North Carolina.

**Heckscher Spring Festival.** April 30-May 1, Long Island, New York.

**World Turtle Day.** May 23.

**Second Mediterranean Congress of Herpetology,** May 23-27, Morocco.

**The Wildlife Society, State Chapter Annual Meetings:**

**Arkansas Chapter, with the Arkansas Chapter of the American Fisheries Society.** February 2-4,  
Little Rock, Arkansas.

**Arizona and New Mexico Chapters, with AZ/NM Chapter, American Fisheries Society.**  
February 3-5, Pinetop, Arizona.

**Virginia Chapter,** February 8-9,  
Front Royal, Virginia.

**Oregon Chapter,** February 9-11,  
Bend, Oregon. Ross Kiester is the banquet speaker, talking turtles!

**Colorado Chapter,** February 21-25,  
Fort Collins, Colorado.

**Indiana Chapter,** with IN Chapter American Fisheries Society. February 22-23,  
Montgomery, Indiana.

**Kentucky Chapter,** February 24-25,  
Lake Cumberland State Park, Kentucky.

**South Dakota Chapter,** February 28-March 2,  
Oacoma, South Dakota

**Wisconsin Chapter,** with Society of American Foresters. March 1-3,  
Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin.

**Washington Chapter, with Society for Northwestern Vertebrate Biology.** March 22-25, Gig Harbor,  
Washington

### Acknowledgements

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Merci, Simon!



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### USFWS Conservation & Trade Management Web Page

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service International Wildlife Trade Program is pleased to announce the posting of a new webpage on our recent workshop “Conservation and Trade Management of Freshwater and Terrestrial Turtles in the United States.” The four day workshop was held in St. Louis, Missouri in September 2010. [http://www.fws.gov/international/DMA\\_DSA/CITES/animals/turtles.html](http://www.fws.gov/international/DMA_DSA/CITES/animals/turtles.html)