



Turtles #1 among all Species in Race to Extinction

Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation and Colleagues Ramp Up Awareness Efforts After Top 25+ Turtles in Trouble Report Published

Washington, DC (February 24, 2011)—Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC), an inclusive partnership dedicated to the conservation of the herpetofauna--reptiles and amphibians--and their habitats, is calling for more education about [turtle conservation](#) after the Turtle Conservation Coalition announced this week their Top 25+ Turtles in Trouble report. PARC initiated a year-long awareness campaign to drive attention to the plight of turtles, now the fastest disappearing species group on the planet.

Trouble for Turtles

The Turtle Conservation Coalition has highlighted the Top 25 most endangered turtle and tortoise species every four years since 2003. This year the list included more species than previous years, expanding the list from a Top 25 to Top 25+. According to the [report](#), between 48 and 54% of all turtles and tortoises are considered threatened, an estimate confirmed by the Red List of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the official list of the conservation status of the world's animals. This alarming percentage is part of the ongoing worldwide loss of biodiversity, with about 30% of amphibians, 25% of mammals, and 12% of birds in similar straits.

The United States is a turtle biodiversity hotspot, hosting more native turtle species than any other country. In the last 30 years, however, many turtle species have become imperiled. There are currently 328 species of turtles known worldwide, with 57 of these species in the United States and Canada.

Biggest Threats

Top 25 Most Endangered Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles at Extremely High Risk of Extinction

Arranged in general and approximate descending order of extinction risk

1. Pinta/Abingdon Island Giant Tortoise
2. Red River/Yangtze Giant Softshell Turtle
3. Yunnan Box Turtle
4. Northern River Terrapin
5. Burmese Roofed Turtle
6. Zhou's Box Turtle
7. McCord's Box Turtle
8. Yellow-headed Box Turtle
9. Chinese Three-striped Box Turtle/Golden Coin Turtle
10. Ploughshare Tortoise/Angonoka
11. Burmese Star Tortoise
12. Roti Island/Timor Snake-necked Turtle
13. Asian Narrow-headed Softshell Turtle
14. Vietnamese/Annam Pond Turtle
15. Central American River Turtle
16. Madagascan Big-headed Turtle
17. Southern River Terrapin
18. Red-crowned Roofed Turtle
19. Sulawesi Forest Turtle
20. Sulawesi Forest Turtle
21. Hoge's Side-necked Turtle
22. Geometric Tortoise
23. Philippine Forest Turtle
24. Magdalena River Turtle
25. Painted Terrapin

Habitat loss and degradation— Many turtles are only found in a few locations which heightens their risk of losses when habitat changes occur. Turtle habitats are subject to many types of human alteration, such as wetland drainage or water diversions. When the habitat of more widespread species is lost or degraded (i.e. land development or other land uses), larger populations become isolated and places to feed, mate, or nest become harder to find. Over a relatively short time, this can lead to population declines of ‘common’ species.

Overexploitation of wild turtles for food, traditional medicines, and pets—People have been using turtles as food, medicines, and pets for thousands of years; however, a rapidly growing human population of over 6 billion people has created an unprecedented increase in these uses. An estimated 300 million turtles are consumed each year in Asia alone. When a large number of individuals are removed, the remaining turtles cannot produce enough offspring quickly to maintain a healthy population. While there are gains being made in farm-raised turtles, wild turtles often are valued more than farmed turtles in some markets, and illegal or ‘black market’ [trade of turtles](#), including rare and highly threatened species, continues to increase.

Other Threats

Roads, agricultural machinery, fishing by catch, and predators— Slow-moving turtles often are victims to fast moving cars or agricultural machinery. In addition, when they are unintentionally caught underwater in fishing nets, they may drown before they can escape or be removed.

Invasive species and diseases—When non-native (exotic) animal species come into contact with native turtle species, they can compete for food and other resources. Some introduced animals are predators on turtles or carry diseases affecting turtles. Non-native plants can alter habitats where turtles live by changing the availability of their food, water, nesting sites, or shelter.

Climate change—In combination with the above threats, a changing climate can alter many aspects of a turtle’s life cycle. Altered temperature and rainfall patterns can affect food and water sources as well as availability of suitable nesting sites. Additionally, nest temperatures affect the sex of an individual hatchling for many species. Therefore, continued changes in climate trends over time could reduce reproduction significantly.

“The Turtle Conservation Coalition’s report calls attention to this alarming and growing problem. Turtles play a significant role in our natural and cultural heritage, but we are on the verge of losing many of these unique creatures forever. The bad news is that all of the [threats to turtles](#) are directly or indirectly tied to human activities. The good news is that this gives us a chance to change the outcome. We started the Year of the Turtle campaign to teach people how to take action and help keep turtles as a common part of the ecosystem,” says Alvin Breisch, PARC National Steering Committee Co-chair.

Take Action

With human intervention, the decline of turtles, particularly in North American can be reduced or prevented. The *Year of the Turtle* campaign advocates for three basic approaches for species

conservation: 1) protecting rare species and their habitats, 2) managing common turtle species and their habitats so that they remain common, and 3) managing crisis situations, such as rare species in peril or acute hazards such as oil spills. Employing monthly newsletters, education campaigns directed at school-aged children, a monthly turtle photo contest and other efforts and with support from conservation associations and wildlife advocacy groups from around the country the *Year of the Turtle* campaign will educate the public about the plight of turtles.

For more information on how to get involved in turtle conservation visit
www.yearoftheturtle.org.

About Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation

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. 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, 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>.