



2023

ANNUAL REPORT

Collaborative to Combat the
Illegal Trade in Turtles



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Prepared by
The CCITT Leadership Board

The Collaborative to Combat the Illegal Trade in Turtles (CCITT) is a Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC) national task team formed in 2018 that strives to build a cross-disciplinary and multi-sectoral network of conservation professionals dedicated to addressing the challenges that stem from illegal collection and trade.

The mission of the CCITT is to advance efforts to better understand, prevent, and eliminate the illegal collection and trade of North America's native turtles - a threat that puts many species at risk.

Cover photo by Tyler DeVos
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Visit our Website:

<https://parcplace.org/species/collaborative-to-combat-the-illegal-trade-in-turtles/>

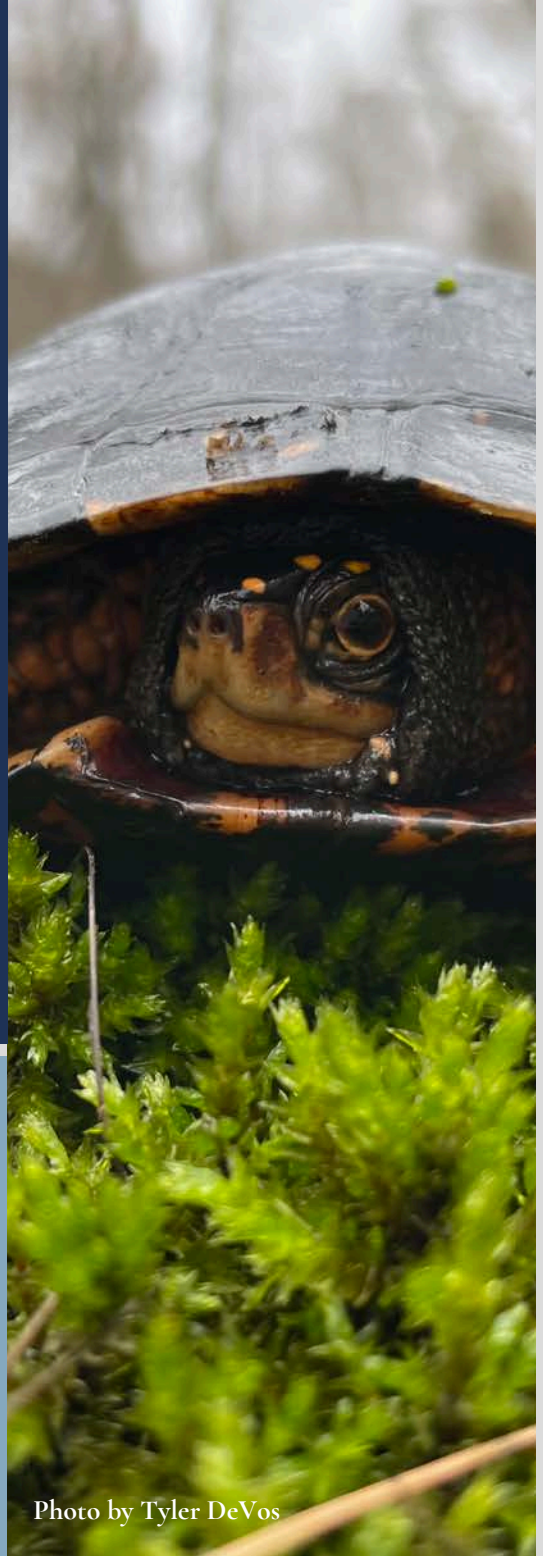


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THE MISSION CONTINUES

Confiscated eastern box turtles; photo courtesy of New England Aquarium



In 2023, the Collaborative to Combat the Illegal Trade in Turtles (CCITT) experienced significant growth and development as an organization. Overall membership increased, including participation in each of the five CCITT working groups. Deliverables were produced that both increase awareness of illegal turtle activities and offer strategies for tackling the issue. A selection of deliverables completed in 2023 can be found in the pages that follow.

Monthly calls featuring guest speakers remained an important way of providing value to all members. Ten presentations were delivered by experts from the disciplines of biology, policy, social science, criminology, forensic science, and more. These presentations provide useful, oftentimes actionable, information pertaining to the illegal collection and trade of turtles. All presentations were recorded and are available to members.

The January monthly call was designated for the third annual State Roundtable. The purpose of the State Roundtable is to provide a forum where all jurisdictions have an opportunity to share relevant information observed over the course of the previous year. Updates often involve observations from criminal cases, trends in species in trade, and initiatives underway to confront illegal trade. This call is not recorded, but detailed notes are available to members. In 2023, attendance on monthly calls averaged 45 people.

MEMBERSHIP GROWTH AND LEADERSHIP CHANGES



Photo by Patrick Randall
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CCITT reached a milestone in October 2023 - the group has been hard at work for five years! Since its founding in 2018, CCITT has grown substantially in membership. In 2023, the CCITT welcomed 34 new members and expanded to a total of 178 members.

The following is a breakdown by job category of the 34 new members: academia (2), agency biologists (13), law enforcement personnel (14), legal professionals (1), non-governmental organization professionals (4). Additionally, several individuals joined the Leadership Board and Steering Committee:

- Emily Horton, Ph.D., Social Scientist, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service became a co-chair of the Human Dimensions Working Group
- Tom Loring, Special Agent, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service became co-chair of the Law Enforcement Working Group
- Justus Nethero, Wildlife Investigator, Ohio Department of Natural Resources became co-chair of the Law Enforcement Working Group

EVENTS AND PRESENTATIONS



Above: CCITT Workshop participants at NCTC January 2023

One of the most effective ways for CCITT to raise awareness, educate, network, and advance its mission is through presentations and workshops. CCITT members provided talks at a number of conferences in 2023. Additionally, CCITT teamed with Foundations of Success to facilitate a workshop with over 40 stakeholders from across the United States and Canada. This multidisciplinary cohort of professionals met at the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, West Virginia, to strategize on how best to address the problem of illegal turtle trade - work that has been critical towards the development of the CCITT Strategic Plan. Below is a brief summary of CCITT presentations and events from 2023.

- January - hosted interdisciplinary workshop on illegal turtle trade at National Conservation Training Center (NCTC), Shepherdstown, West Virginia
- March - presented on general CCITT updates to Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Committee at North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference, St. Louis, Missouri (virtual)
- March - presented on CCITT, illegal turtle trade, and case studies at Southeast AFWA Intelligence and Investigations Summit, Helen, Georgia
- July - presented on CCITT and facilitated session on illegal turtle trade at Emydine Turtle Symposium, Juniata College, Huntingdon, Pennsylvania
- July - presented on CCITT at the Northeast Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (NEPARC) annual meeting at Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut

HIGHLIGHTED PRODUCTS



Jeff Corwin

Host. Biologist. Wildlife Advocate.

[Communication Guide](#) - an internal document created to help partners communicate about the illegal collection and trade in North American turtles using consistent language and information. The document helps underscore important messaging and prevents the spread of misinformation.

[Jeff Corwin Documentary](#) - partnering with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, AFWA, and the greater PARC organization, CCITT helped to coordinate and amplify a short documentary on the impacts of illegal collection featuring television personality Jeff Corwin. The nearly six-minute video featuring state and federal wildlife law enforcement was shared across social media platforms and registered over 4k likes on USFWS's Instagram account.

[State Confiscation Plan Template](#) - this document was created by the Confiscation and Repatriation Working Group to define roles and make recommendations for the effective, efficient, and legal response to a turtle seizure, confiscation, or surrender.

[Website Improvements](#) - the CCITT webpages on the PARC website were improved. A navigation bar was added to link together all CCITT content, and a number of additional resources were added to the Media and Resources page.

[Wild Turtle Week](#) - the Human Dimensions and Communications Working Group led the effort to launch Wild Turtle Week, a conservation messaging initiative that reached around 4.4 million people on social media. There were 58.3k interactions, 55.2k shares, and 57.1k likes on different social media channels for content that included the hashtag #wildturtleweek.

2024 OUTLOOK



Photo by Sam Stukel USFWS

2024 is anticipated to be another busy year for CCITT. Major initiatives on the 2024 Annual Agenda include:

- an in-person workshop focused on the further development of CCITT's Strategic Plan,
- publication of a peer-reviewed manuscript describing the organization in a major turtle conservation journal,
- and participation in an in-person symposium at the World Congress of Herpetology focused on international trade in amphibians and reptiles.

Other initiatives include an ambitious approach to amplify our message with conservation partners, the production of a best management practices document for protecting the geographic locations of turtle populations, and production of a restitution cost document to be used in courts of law that makes recommendations for the value of confiscated turtles. Additionally, the CCITT will look to continue to grow its membership and spread its message to targeted audiences within government, the greater conservation community, and the public.