



TURTLE SURVIVAL ALLIANCE

AN IUCN PARTNERSHIP NETWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE CAPTIVE MANAGEMENT OF FRESHWATER TURTLES AND TORTOISES

Tuesday, January 27, 2009

Update from Myanmar

Rick Hudson

From 7 – 10 January 2009 the TSA and WCS, in conjunction with the Myanmar Forestry Department, conducted two workshops in Mandalay. A Species Recovery Plan workshop for the Burmese roof turtle, *Batagur (Kachuga) trivittata*, was followed by a comprehensive trade workshop entitled *Developing an Integrative Strategy for Handling Confiscated Turtles in Myanmar*. Around 50 people participated in the four day workshop including the Director General of the Forestry Department and representatives from the wildlife sanctuaries and captive chelonian facilities in Myanmar. The multinational nine member TSA contingent, or Team Burma, included Rick Hudson, Gerald Kuchling, Peter Paul van Dijk, Bill Holmstrom, Bonnie Raphael, Brian Horne, Steve and Kalyar Platt and Tim McCormack. The workshop was both interactive and engaging, and produced documents on potential release sites for confiscated chelonians, release strategies, prioritized list of species for assurance colonies and special handling, recommended sites for assurance colonies and rescue facilities, captive and wild management strategies for Burmese roof turtles and captive management of star tortoises. Concurrent with the general workshop, Bonnie, Peter Paul and Bill conducted a half day training workshop on identification, husbandry and medical management of chelonians rescued from the trade.



The final report will provide a blueprint for turtle conservation in Myanmar for the next five years. Currently Myanmar is considered ground zero for turtle conservation in Asia, and the volume of turtles pouring across the border into China is staggering. Fortunately Myanmar still has some healthy turtle populations remaining that can be saved but swift action is required. With 27 species of chelonians, 7 of them endemic, Myanmar is a true turtle diversity hotspot and one of the highest priorities for turtle conservation globally. We are confident that this workshop successfully launched a process to protect this important resource. This workshop was generously supported with grants from the Turtle Conservation Fund (TCF), Andy Sabin and the Batchelor Foundation, and with funding from WCS and TSA. Following the workshop Team Burma embarked on a ten day tour to assess the needs and potential of the varied chelonian facilities throughout Myanmar. Six Forestry Department-run facilities and two privately owned ventures were inspected and the following recommendations made:

- Expanding Burmese star tortoise facilities at Lawkananda Park in Bagan and Shwesettaw Wildlife

Sanctuary

- Construction of new and expanded Burmese roof turtle facilities at Yadanabon Zoo and Htamanthi Wildlife Sanctuary
- Development of three new turtle rescue facilities in Lashio, Myitkyina and Mandalay – all along major trade routes into China
- Building three Asian mountain tortoise (*Manouria emys*) facilities to distribute the group of 60 that was rescued in August 2007 and still resides at Yadanabon Zoo
- Building two facilities for the Arakan forest turtle, *Heosemys depressa*, with the natural range of the species



In addition to captive facility construction, to be successful the Myanmar turtle conservation strategy will require capacity building in the form of training workshop, and hiring new dedicated staff positions. A full-time turtle conservation coordinator and a veterinarian will be required to effectively manage the diverse scope of the proposed activities. Within the next month we will be receiving cost estimates on the construction work and start the prioritization process for funding. The price tag for this program will not be cheap and the TSA will be launching a full scale fund-raising drive very soon. We will be meeting this challenge with a strong team approach composed of foreign NGOs and government, and are confident that TSA is the group to lead this effort. The stakes are high and failure is simply not an option.



FIRST CAPTIVE BREEDING OF THE BURMESE ROOF TURTLE

A high point of the workshop was the announcement that a juvenile *B. trivittata* had been pulled from the adult breeding pond at the Yadanabon Zoo just one week earlier. Apparently hatched in 2008 from an undetected nest the specimen is in the same size class as a cohort of 2008 wild-hatched juveniles from the Upper Chindwin River. Robust and healthy, the hatchling had obviously fared well in the semi-natural adult breeding pond. The keeper reports that several others have been seen up basking in the adult pond, and a full inspection of the sand nest bank revealed a number of old nests with hatched egg shells. This is remarkable news and helps settle our concerns that something was missing in their captive diet or environment.



*Excavating the *B. trivittata* nesting beach at Yadanabon Zoo.*