

Bernard Devaux Receives the 5th Annual 2010 Behler Turtle Conservation Award



The IUCN/SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group and the Turtle Survival Alliance are pleased to announce that the 5th Annual Behler Turtle Conservation Award was presented to Bernard Devaux from SOPTOM, Gonfaron, France, at the 8th Annual Symposium on Conservation and Biology of Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles in Orlando, Florida, on 19 August 2010. Presenting the Award were Rick Hudson, President of TSA, and Anders Rhodin, Chair of TFTSG, with Peter Pritchard providing a personal introduction and history of the awardee's accomplishments.

Bernard Devaux is a leading turtle conservationist whose work in France and around the world has been inspirational for many, as he has created a series of educational "turtle villages" around the world and worked tirelessly for the conservation of wild populations of turtles and tortoises. He is essentially a self-taught naturalist, as well as a traveler, writer, and film director. He believes that a new way of thinking is needed to protect the world's turtles and tortoises better, by disseminating information and raising awareness among children and the general public, starting with the premise that tortoises are not creatures to be kept in a garden or an aquarium, they are not toys for children to play with, nor are they trophies for collectors—they are wild animals that should be protected in their natural habitat.

In 1986, Bernard created the SOPTOM association (*Station d'Observation et de Protection des Tortues et de leurs Milieux*) [Station for the Observation and Protection of Turtles and their Habitats] in order to study and protect the Hermann's tortoise (*Testudo hermanni*). He then created the *Village des Tortues* [Turtle Village] in Gonfaron in southern France in 1988. The idea was to finance conservation by opening a visitor center that was not only scientific but also accessible to the public. Spurred on by the success of the concept, he opened the first Turtle Clinic in Europe (1989) followed by other Turtle Villages in Corsica (at Moltifao in 1992), Senegal (at Noflaye in 1995), and Madagascar (at Ifaty in 2003).

Through making films about reptiles, as well as holding conferences and meeting other tortoise and nature enthusiasts such as David Stubbs, Ian Swingland, Gerald and Lee Durrell, and Peter Pritchard, Bernard became a fierce protector of Europe's tortoises, then of tortoises in other French-speaking countries, and finally all over the world. He uses a variety of media in France and abroad (television, radio and films, as well as specialized and general press) to raise as much public awareness as possible regarding the fate of our planet's turtles and tortoises. He has written over ten books on tortoises, both specialized and generalized, as well as an Encyclopedia of Turtles of the World (1996), in four languages, in conjunction with two other naturalist photographers, Alain Dupré and Franck Bonin. He is a specialist on the African tortoise *Centrochelys sulcata* and the Aldabra tortoise *Dipsochelys dussumieri* [= *Aldabrachelys gigantea*], and wrote two

monographs in French and English on these species in 2000 and 2007. He has also recently published a bilingual monograph on the Madagascan tortoise, *Astrochelys radiata*, which he studies and protects on the south of the island.

He is a great believer in globalizing conservation. By developing a worldwide network of specialists, enthusiasts, and those who work tirelessly to protect turtles, we can combat trafficking, collecting, and the removal of turtles and tortoises from their natural habitat. With this aim, he has organized and sponsored several international chelonian conferences and symposia on conservation (1995 in Gonfaron and 2003 in Senegal), pathology (1992), the European turtle, *Emys orbicularis* (1999), and the palearctic tortoises, *Testudo* (2002). In October 2010, he will co-sponsor the fifth European Symposium on *Emys orbicularis* (in conjunction with the Swiss association, P.R.T.).

To encourage the creation of a worldwide chelonian conservation network, he visits and assists centers and programmes around the world (Spain, Italy, Costa Rica, China, Malaysia, Australia, South Africa) and keeps specialists informed via his *La Tortue* magazine, which is distributed in 25 countries (3 issues a year, in French but with a small English supplement). He firmly believes that globalizing skills and consciences is the only way (thanks to the internet, and powerful organizations such as the IUCN, CI, WWF, and TSA) to act quickly in order to prevent major turtle and tortoise sites from being destroyed, such as in Aldabra in 2005 and in the Mary River in eastern Australia in 2009.

His ambition is to put an end to the turtle and tortoise trade, and to see every country restore its territory's biotopes and chelonian populations. He also hopes that other information and conservation centers similar to the Turtle Villages will be opened in several countries, encouraging the desire to protect local chelonian populations efficiently. In addition, he hopes that young herpetologists, environmentalists and biologists will fiercely devote themselves to much-needed chelonian conservation on our planet. He often reminds us (as P. Pritchard and J. Behler said): *tortoises have been on our planet for 230 million years, but we have a responsibility now, in the 21st century, to make sure they do not disappear!*

The IUCN/SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group and Turtle Survival Alliance established the Behler Turtle Conservation Award in 2006, a major annual award presented jointly by these groups to honor leadership and excellence in the field of tortoise and freshwater turtle conservation. The award honors the memory of John L. Behler, previous Chair of the Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group and Curator of Herpetology at the Bronx Zoo, Wildlife Conservation Society. The Award includes an honorarium of \$3000, and co-sponsors this year are Chelonian Research Foundation, Conservation International, Chelonian Research Institute, Behler Chelonian Center / Turtle Conservancy, World Chelonian Trust, Wildlife Conservation Society, Deborah Behler, and Brett and Nancy Stearns.

Previous Behler Award honorees have been Ed Moll, Whit Gibbons, Peter Pritchard, and Gerald Kuchling. A history of the Award and details on its honorees are available at

www.iucn-tftsg.org/behler/. In addition to honoring the life-time achievements of senior turtle and tortoise conservationists, the Award also honors conservation efforts by younger individuals who make major contributions to the field. Recognizing and valuing the often tireless and dedicated efforts made by all these individuals is important, and the Behler Award hopes to provide some inspiration and reward for those who have demonstrated excellence and leadership on the front lines of global turtle conservation efforts.