

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

First the Frogs, Now the Turtles? Global Extinction Event Revealed in New Report.

SINGAPORE, Feb. 21, 2011 - -

The plight of the planet's tortoises and turtles -- creatures that have roamed the Earth for 220 million years -- has never been greater, according to a detailed report released today by the Turtle Conservation Coalition. It shows the world's 25 most endangered tortoises and freshwater turtles will become extinct in the next few decades without concerted conservation efforts.

Worldwide the hunting of turtles is at vastly unsustainable levels. For example, in just one market in Dhaka, Bangladesh close to 100,000 wild caught turtles are butchered for consumption during a one-day religious holiday each year. Furthering the problem is a lucrative international black-market trade in pet turtles and tortoises that has escalated prices of some of the more rare species into the tens of thousands of dollars. Rumors even exist that some of the rarest Asian species are now commanding prices in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

“Turtles are in serious trouble. They are some of the world’s most endangered vertebrates, more than mammals, birds, and even amphibians. Half of their species are threatened with extinction,” notes Anders Rhodin. “They’re being collected from the wild for food, perceived medicinal beliefs, and pets, while their habitats are being polluted and destroyed every day.”

Of the 25 most endangered turtles, over two-thirds (17) are from Asia, a result of decades of massive exploitation of the region’s turtle. Evolutionary marvels, their armored shells no longer ensure their survival. “Shells work great against natural predators, but are no match against humans armed with fire, knives and trucks” said Peter Paul van Dijk.

Number one on the list is the Pinta Island Tortoise, one of the Galapagos tortoise species that contributed to Charles Darwin’s theories on Natural Selection. Sadly, only a single male of this species, ‘Lonesome George’, remains alive today. Ironically, Darwin and other travelers often ate many of the islands’ tortoises and released rats, goats, and other animals, which significantly contributed to their decline. Close behind is the Red River Giant Softshell Turtle of China and Vietnam, weighing over 250 lbs with a shell over three feet long. With only four animals left (three males and one female), the stakes have never been higher.

Some species are in danger of disappearing before scientists even find out where they live. Zhou’s Box Turtle (6th most endangered) has occasionally appeared in the turtle markets of China, but to date no one has located a wild population.

Rick Hudson, President of the Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA) says, "Turtles are disappearing fast and we are dealing with one of the most significant wildlife crises of our lifetime".

The TSA www.turtlesurvival.org has taken up the fight to save turtles; the group is "Committed to Zero Turtle Extinctions". The TSA works closely with other organization such as the IUCN Tortoise & Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group, the Turtle Conservation Fund, the Wildlife Conservation Society, Conservation International, and San Diego Zoo Global, all of whom came together to produce this important report.

You can help stop Turtle Extinctions by Texting TSA followed by a space and the amount you wish to donate to the number 27138

Download the Report 'TURTLES IN TROUBLE: The World's 25+ Most Endangered Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles - 2011(PDF) at <http://www.iucn-tftsg.org>

About the Turtle Survival Alliance: is dedicated to conserve tortoises and turtles through a global network of species recovery efforts and captive breeding programs. More information can be found at www.turtlesurvival.org.

About the Turtle Conservation Coalition: is an informal alliance of the following turtle- and conservation- focused organizations currently working together on behalf of chelonian and biodiversity conservation: the *International Union for Conservation of Nature's* Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group, the Turtle Conservation Fund, the Turtle Survival Alliance, the Turtle Conservancy / Behler Chelonian Center, Chelonian Research Foundation, Conservation International, Wildlife Conservation Society, and San Diego Zoo Global.

Quotes provided by the following:

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