

CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA



Twenty-sixth meeting of the Animals Committee
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EXTRACT FROM THE PRELIMINARY REPORT WITH RECOMMENDATIONS
AND CONCLUSIONS FROM THE SINGAPORE WORKSHOP
ON ASIAN TORTOISES AND FRESHWATER TURTLES

The attached information document has been submitted by the United States of America in relation to agenda item 18.

* *The geographical designations employed in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the CITES Secretariat or the United Nations Environment Programme concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or area, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The responsibility for the contents of the document rests exclusively with its author.*

**Extract from the Preliminary Report with Recommendations and Conclusions from the Singapore
Workshop on Asian Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles**

The attached information document has been submitted by the United States in relation to a workshop on “*Conservation of Asian Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles: Setting Priorities for the Next Ten Years*” held in Singapore, February 21st – 24th, 2011.

Recalling the findings and recommendations of the Animal Committee’s *Technical Workshop on Conservation of and Trade in Freshwater Turtles and Tortoises* (Kunming, China; March 2002) (see AC18 Inf. 12), and also Doc AC19 Doc 15.1 (*Conservation and trade in freshwater turtles and tortoises: Addressing recommendations from the Kunming Workshop*) which makes extensive listing discussion and recommendations. At its 19th meeting (Geneva, August 2003) the Animals Committee endorsed (with amendments) the findings of its working group on tortoises and freshwater turtles (Chair, Africa), including encouraging Parties to proceed with proposals to list all remaining unlisted Asian freshwater turtles (see AC 19 Doc 15.1).

Recalling recommendation 2 of the AC25 Tortoises and freshwater turtles working group “*The AC shall review at its 26th meeting the results of the North American Turtle Trade Workshop, held in St. Louis in September 2010, and the Asian Turtle Conservation Workshop held in Singapore in February 2011, and additional pertinent information, and make recommendations for the consideration of the Parties to amend the CITES Appendices with regard to turtle species.*”(AC25 WG7 Doc.1), specifically referring to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife-sponsored workshop on *Conservation and Trade Management of Freshwater and Terrestrial Turtles in the United States* (September 2010, St. Louis, Missouri) (http://www.fws.gov/international/DMA_DSA/CITES/animals/turtles.html) and Singapore workshops. The United States has been informed by the Wildlife Conservation Society and the IUCN Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group that the Singapore workshop proceedings are not yet fully available. Therefore, , the United States is providing an excerpted version of the Singapore workshop report related to CITES and other trade management issues to inform the Animals Committee in its deliberations on AC25 WG7 Recommendation 2.

Extract from the Preliminary Report with Recommendations and Conclusions from the Workshop

“Conservation of Asian Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles: Setting Priorities for the Next Ten Years”

Singapore, February 21st – 24th, 2011

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This extract document contains the sections from the full preliminary report that pertain to issues of international trade and CITES measures; for full details please consult the full report once it becomes publicly available.

Introduction

Asia is a vast continent, with varied habitats and the world’s most species rich and diverse turtle fauna. In 1999, due to a growing concern about the plight of Asian turtles, a meeting was convened in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The focus of the meeting was to discuss the status and the burgeoning trade of wild turtles for consumption, traditional medicines, and the pet trade that could be measured in tons of living turtles being traded daily in open markets throughout Asia. The meeting revealed that the situation was far worse than any individual group or region had previously imagined. Sadly, many Asian chelonians were headed towards extinction at an unprecedented rate and immediate conservation actions were necessary. Notable turtle conservation initiatives that arose shortly thereafter include the Turtle Conservation Fund (TCF), the Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA), and the Asian Turtle Conservation Network (ATCN).

Significant strides have been made since the 1999 workshop, such as the last known female *Rafetus swinhoei* being paired with a male at the Suzhou Zoo in China. Notably no species of turtles has gone extinct and a small number of species thought to be extinct were rediscovered (e.g., *Cuora yunnanensis* and *Siebenrockiella leytensis*). The Burmese Roofed Turtle (*Batagur trivittata*) an additional species feared to be extinct in 1999 was rediscovered in the remote Chindwin River Valley in northwestern Myanmar where upon an integrated recovery program was initiated which combines captive breeding, head-starting, and field conservation. This has resulted in the known global population of these turtles to grow from just seven individuals to over 400. Already a great conservation and management success, the next phase of this project will be to release some of these young back into the native rivers, where mitigation of threats and education of the local people will ensure its survival.

Yet, the trade in wild caught turtles and turtle products (e.g., meat, shell, eggs, and cartilage) is still the number one problem facing global turtle populations. As long-lived vertebrates, which have a reproductive strategy that is reliant on adults living for numerous decades, increases in annual adult mortality can rapidly cause populations to decline or collapse. Moreover, such populations are slow to recover as juvenile turtles naturally have high mortality rates and often require more than a decade to reach sexual maturity. Failure to enforce local and international laws continues to hinder progress and legal loopholes provide avenues for wildlife traders to skirt the legal requirements of trading in endangered species.

In response, a three-day workshop on the plight of Asia’s tortoises and freshwater turtles and their conservation was held in Singapore (February 21st – 24th, 2011) to detail how turtle conservation within the region has progressed, and to identify avenues for future action. Nearly 70 delegates from 17 countries – including 14 Asian nations – attended. Wildlife Reserves Singapore (WRS), the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), and the TSA hosted the workshop in collaboration

with the Wildlife Reserves Singapore Conservation Fund, San Diego Zoo Global, the IUCN Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group (TFTSG), and Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden.

A primary directive and the basis of the workshop, participants were tasked with looking back at the last decade of turtle conservation since the pivotal meeting in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in 1999 that first brought together the region's turtle experts. By assessing the past eleven years, participants were able to identify what actions worked well, which ones did not work as well as hoped, and which recommendations/priorities had not been adequately addressed. Next, the participants were asked to look forward to determine emerging trends and new developments and dilemmas/challenges in the continuously changing habitat impacts and market trade in turtles and turtle products.

Herein, we present a set of recommendations and conclusions arising from presentations, discussions, and break-out sessions at the workshop. The first set of overall recommendations represent the immediate steps necessary for staving off extinction of Asia's most endangered turtles. These recommendations are of the highest priority.

Key policy recommendations are then made, arising from an International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red-Listing process that was incorporated as part of the Singapore workshop and a specific session on the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The Red List ranks the species in terms of how imperiled the individual species are, and recommended changes in rankings reflect how species' present status and survival prospects are compared to previous years. These recommendations dovetail into recommendations for proposed changes to the CITES listing of Asian turtles and how specific species need to be more strictly regulated and supervised in their international trade to protect wild populations. The key policy recommendations should be pivotal in encouraging participating countries to enforce existing laws and regulations and in some cases create new laws or regulations.

Two genera, *Batagur* and *Cuora*, have been identified as priority groups as they make up a large percentage of the most critically endangered turtles in Asia. This is followed by a section on emerging threats and includes recommendations for dealing with these new issues. After which we detail a number of emerging opportunities for turtle conservation in Asia. We then detail two potential species for pilot reintroduction programs. Before we conclude, we detail species-specific recommendations for the 36 confirmed and proposed Critically Endangered Turtles and Tortoises in South and Southeast Asia, and lastly we have a short section on the need to gather information on species ranked as Data Deficient in order to determine such species population status.

I. Priority Recommendations

The recommendations below are not ranked and are considered of equal importance.

- a. Globally integrated assurance colonies must be created for Critically Endangered and Endangered species of freshwater turtles and tortoises in Southeast Asia**
- b. All Critically Endangered (36) and Endangered (21) species need focused in-situ conservation action.**
- c. Governments must rigorously enforce existing laws and regulations concerning all trade — both national and international — in freshwater turtles and tortoises, and penalties for violation need to be levied to the fullest extent of the relevant laws.** Particular attention by law enforcement officials needs to be directed at preventing wild caught Critically Endangered and Endangered species, as well as their eggs, meat, and shells, from being traded both nationally and internationally.
- d. The identification of field localities is of the utmost priority when there is a complete lack of data or limited information on species-specific field localities**

II. Policy Recommendations

- a. Updates to IUCN Red List Status**
- b. Updates to CITES Statutes**

Thirteen species were recommended to be included in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Appendix II, allowing limited, regulated and reported international trade, and some 25 species were suggested for transfer from Appendix II to Appendix I, prohibiting international commercial trade (See Table 4). All the Chinese and Vietnamese endemic *Cuora* species were recommended for transfer to Appendix I, as well as all species ranked Critically Endangered in the Red List and continuing to be in international trade, including *Platysternon megacephalum*, *Batagur borneoensis*, *Heosemys annandalii*, *Heosemys depressa*, *Mauremys*

annamensis, *Mauremys mutica*, *Nilssonina formosa*, *Nilssonina leithii* and *Siebenrockiella leytensis*. In addition, it was recommended that several species believed to be unsustainably traded internationally as a result of widespread illegal collection and trade: the Indian Flapshell Turtle, *Lissemys punctata*, the Impressed Tortoise, *Manouria impressa*, Cantor's Softshell Turtle, *Pelochelys cantorii*, and Bibron's Softshell Turtle, *Pelochelys bibroni* also be transferred to Appendix I. Appendix I status would strengthen the enforcement options available to wildlife authorities in countries of origin, transit, and destination.

Recommendation

All participants will work with their national CITES Management Authority to propose uplistings relevant to their country and support them through the provision of appropriate scientific data.

III. Priority Genera

IV. Emerging Threats

- a. Internet Trade**
- b. Increase in Turtle Farming and Resulting Changes in Market Structure**
- c. Impacts of Commercial Riverine Sand and Gold Mining**
- d. Calipee Trade**

Recent reports from South Asia have shown an increasing trend of trade in the dried calipee (the cartilaginous parts of a softshell turtle's shell) to China where it is consumed in a soup that has rendered the turtle cartilage into a gelatinous substance. Turtles are often slaughtered merely for this cartilage (meat and bones are not utilized as consumption of these is prohibited under the tenets of a predominant religion in the region). Because the dried cartilage can be stored and stockpiled for lengthy periods before middlemen purchase them from rural traders it has become a lucrative industry. Furthering the problem is that enforcement is limited as it is often difficult to ascertain not only if the dried substance is calipee but also which species the dried cartilage originated from. Adding to the confusion and hiding the problem, it is often shipped in consignments labeled as something entirely different, for example 'buffalo horn'.

V. Emerging Opportunities

- a. Conservation Genetics**
- b. Building Collaborations with Relevant Global and Regional Multi-national Agencies and Initiatives**
- c. Development and Utilization of Rescue Centers
- d. Awareness and Training Materials
- e. Evaluation of Conservation Actions**
- f. Re-introduction Projects

VI. Taxon Specific Recommendations for Critically Endangered Species

Specific recommendations are made in the full report for conservation actions for *Batagur affinis*, *B. baska*, *B. borneoensis*, *K. kachuga*, *B. trivittata*, *Chelodina mccordi*, *Chitra chitra*, *C. vandijki*, *Cuora aurocapitata*, *C. bourreti*, *C. flavomarginata*, *C. galbinifrons*, *C. mccordi*, *C. mouhotii*, *C. pani*, *C. picturata*, *C. trifasciata*, *C. yunnanensis*, *C. zhoui*, *Geochelone platynota*, *Heosemys amandalii*, *H. depressa*, *Leucocephalon yuwonoi*, *Manouria emys*, *M. impressa*, *Mauremys annamensis*, *M. mutica*, *M. nigricans*, *Nilssonina leithii*, *N. nigricans*, *Orlitia borneensis*, *Pelochelys cantorii*, *PLatysternon megacephalum*, *Rafetus swinhoei*, *Sacalia bealei*, and *Siebenrockiella leytensis*. Of these species, all but *Mauremys nigricans*, *Nilssonina leithii*, *Rafetus swinhoei* and *Sacalia bealei* are included in CITES Appendices II or I, and recommendations include adequate enforcement of existing legal protection for all these species, as well as including in Appendix II those currently not listed or listed in Appendix III, and transferring a number of species to Appendix I to ensure maximum effect of trade regulation and enforcement measures.

Table 4. Recommendations of CITES status changes for Asian Freshwater Turtles and Tortoises.

Candidate Species for Inclusion in Appendix I (currently not CITES-listed):

Species	current Status	Country(s) of Origin
<i>Geoemyda japonica</i>	-	JP

Candidate Species for transfer from Appendix II to Appendix I:

Species	current Status	Country(s) of Origin
<i>Batagur borneoensis</i>	II	BN, ID, MY, TH
<i>Chelodina mccordi</i> (incl. <i>timorensis</i>)	II	ID [TL]
<i>Cuora aurocapitata</i>	II	CN
<i>Cuora flavomarginata</i>	II	CN, HK
<i>Cuora galbinifrons</i> *	II	CN, VN
<i>Cuora mccordi</i>	II	CN
<i>Cuora pani</i>	II	CN
<i>Cuora trifasciata</i>	II	CN, HK, LA, VN
<i>Cuora yunnanensis</i>	II	CN
<i>Cuora zhoui</i>	II	CN, VN, LA?
<i>Heosemys annandalii</i>	II	KH, LA, MM? MY, TH, VN
<i>Heosemys depressa</i>	II	MM
<i>Leucocephalon yuwonoi</i>	II	ID
<i>Lissemys punctata</i>	II	BD, LK, IN, NP, MM
<i>Geochelone elegans</i>	II	IN, LK, PK
<i>Geochelone platynota</i>	II	MM
<i>Manouria emys</i>	II	BD, ID, IN, MM, MY, TH
<i>Manouria impressa</i>	II	CN, KH, LA, MM, MY, TH, VN
<i>Mauremys annamensis</i>	II	VN
<i>Mauremys mutica</i>	II	CN, VN
<i>Orlitia borneensis</i>	II	ID, MY, BN?
<i>Pelochelys bibroni</i>	II	ID, PNG
<i>Pelochelys cantorii</i>	II	BD, CN, ID, IN, KH, LA?, MY, MM, PH, TH, VN
<i>Platysternon megacephalum</i>	II	CN, KH, LA, MM, TH, VN
<i>Siebenrockiella leytenis</i>	II	PH

Candidate Species for Inclusion in Appendix II:

Species	current Status	Country(s) of Origin
<i>Chelodina spp</i> **	---	AU, ID, PNG [TL]
<i>Cyclemys spp</i> **	---	BD, BN, CN?, ID, IN, KH, LA, MM, MY, PH, SG, TH, VN
<i>Elseya spp</i> ****	---	AU, ID, PNG [Palau]
<i>Geoemyda spengleri</i>	III (China)	CN, LA, VN
<i>Hardella thurjii</i>	---	BD, IN, NP, PK
<i>Dogania subplana</i>	---	BN, ID, MM, MY, PH, SG, TH
<i>Melanochelys trijuga</i>	---	BD, IN, LK, MM
<i>Morenia petersi</i>	---	BD, IN, NP
<i>Nilssonina leithii</i>	---	IN – possible candidate for App. I
<i>Nilssonina formosa</i>	---	MM – possible candidate for App. I
<i>Palea steindachneri</i>	III (China)	CN, LA, VN (USA*)
<i>Sacalia spp</i>	III (China)	CN, LA, VN
<i>Vijayachelys silvatica</i>	---	IN – possible candidate for App. I

* Establish introduced population, ** All species within the genus, *** both *C. rugosa/siebenrocki* (species differentiation disputed) and *C. reimanni* as significantly traded species, other species in genus to be evaluated for look-alike reasons, **** including the genus *Myuchelys*

AU = Australia, BD = Bangladesh, BN = Brunei, KH = Cambodia, CN = China, ID = India, IN = Indonesia, KH = Hong Kong, LA = Laos, LK = Sri Lanka, MM = Myanmar, MY = Malaysia, NP = Nepal, Palau = Republic of Palau, PH = Philippines, PK = Pakistan, PNG = Papua New Guinea, SG = Singapore, TH = Thailand, TL = Timor Leste, VN = Vietnam