

Asian Turtle News

NEWS FROM FRONTLINE OF CONSERVATION

The Asian Turtle Conservation Network

22 December 2010

Interview surveys for endangered tortoise and freshwater turtles in the central highlands of Vietnam

High species diversity and endemism are associated with the range of climatic conditions and habitat found in the annamite mountain range of the central highlands in Vietnam. Unsurprisingly this area is an exciting prospect for conducting tortoise and freshwater turtles surveys and is considered a priority for the Asian Turtle Program (ATP) of Cleveland Metroparks Zoo. With a focus area covering 10 provinces from Thua Thien Hue in the north to Khanh Hoa province the research team has completed interviews along much of the coast during 2009. During 2010 efforts have focused on the central highlands and interviews completed throughout Kon Tum and Gia Lai provinces. These surveys have focused on collecting local hunting and trade data to identify potential habitat for critically endangered and endemic turtle species potentially occurring in the provinces including three edemic, the Vietnamese Pond Turtle (*Mauremys annamensis*), Bourret's Box Turtle (*Cuora bourreti*) and the Lesser Indochinese Box Turtle (*Cuora picturata*).

During September and November 2010 all eight districts of Kon Tum province were visited and 74 interviews conducted with 40 field records of six species observed including Big Headed Turtles (*Platysternon megacephalum*), Impressed Tortoise (*Manouria impressa*) and Elongated Tortoise (*Indotestudo elongata*) which are all protected under Decree 32. Although no information was found for the Vietnamese Pond Turtle or Bourret's Box Turtle in the province it appears to be an significant area for two species of conservation importance, the Big Headed Turtle and Impressed Tortoise.

Interviews have also been completed in Gia Lai province, undertake from December 2009 too January 2010 and again in August 2010 to cover 16 districts. In Gia Lai a great deal of information was collected with 62 turtles of eight species

observed during 151 interviews. Most significant was the observation of 26 Vietnamese Pond Turtles (*Mauremys annamensis*) some of which were apparently caught locally. This range restricted endemic is a global priority for conservation listed amongst the top 25 most endangered tortoise and freshwater turtles in the world by the Turtle Conservation Fund (TCF). Most of the information collected by the teams to dates indicates this species was most abundant in lowland wetland areas but has now largely disappeared throughout its range.



Photo 1: Mang Buk Commune, Kon Plon district, good habitat for *Platysternon megacephalum*

With much of the initial survey work now completed in central Vietnam the team hopes to focus additional interview and field surveys and awareness activities at priority locations identified during this first phase. Having already received training in community engagement and school programs by Education for Nature Vietnam (ENV) in February awareness activities have also commenced. Since July the team have conducted community meetings and school programs in Quang Nam and Quang Ngai province for 169 villagers and 142 school pupils around priority areas identified for the Vietnamese Pond Turtle.

**Photo highlights from MAP
Kon Tum survey**



Interviews with a Bana ethnic lady making traditional woven clothing in Chu Prong district, Gia Lai Province



*Ngoc Linh Nature Reserve provides suitable habitat for Impressed Tortoise (*Manouria impressa*)*



Nguyen Chi Nhan conducts an interview in Gia Lai Province



Road in Kong Chro district, Gia Lai



Many endangered Big Headed Turtles were seen during the surveys, this one in Ngoc Hoi District, Kon Tum Province



A Cycllemys tcheponensis seen in Dak Ha District, Kon Tum Province



A Manouria impressa shell from an animal eaten in Kbang District, Gia Lai Province



12 Juvenile Mauremys annamensis observed in residence of a local man in Gia Lai Province

The team would like to thank Gai Lai and Kon Tum People's committee and Forest Protection Department (FPD) for their help during the surveys.

Press release by:

Nguyen Van Luc – Asian Turtle Program Field Officer
Duong Dinh Vuong – Asian Turtle Program Field Officer

Ha Thi Nga - Asian Turtle Program Administrator Officer
Tim McCormack – Asian Turtle Program Coordinator

Research conducted by ATP staff: Hoang Van Ha, Nguyen Van Luc, Nguyen Chi Nhan and Ha Thi Nga.

Support the survey was provided by The Mohamed Bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund, The Turtle Conservation Fund and the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF)

For further information please contact:

Asian Turtle Program

PO Box 179

Hanoi, Vietnam

Tel: +84 (0) 43514 9750

Email: asianturtleprogram@gmail.com

Visit the Asian Turtle Conservation Network website:

www.asianturtlenetwork.org