



## Asian Turtle Conservation Network

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### The Asian Turtle Crisis Documenting the Decline of Turtles

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Asia's turtles are in serious trouble. Ecologically crafted to live in a world where adult mortality is relatively low, affording turtles a long lifetime to reproduce, it is clear that most turtles are not well adapted for this modern world dominated by humans. Indeed humans have become the wholesale predators of turtles, exploiting them en masse, regardless of species, size, and without consideration for the sustainability of such practices. The Asian turtles crisis is indeed a tragedy of indifference, ignorance, and greed. Sadly, we may not fully appreciate the extent of this tragedy until history is written about the turtles that once were.

On the front lines of the crisis lie substantial obstacles facing conservationists. Low enforcement capacity, traditional attitudes towards turtles and other wildlife, too few national experts or people willing to invest the time and energy into conserving turtles, and a host of other factors pose significant obstacles to progress. Moreover, loss of habitat resulting from forest destruction, agricultural conversion, pollution, construction of dams and encroachment of human settlement leave surviving wild populations under intense pressure from hunters and collectors, clustered in shrinking parks and nature reserves scattered throughout the region.

The time for action is now, if turtles are to remain a part of the region's biodiversity, and perhaps survive another 250 million years on earth. Investment must be efficient and focused on efforts and initiatives that will actively make a difference for turtles on the ground. Science, research, and monitoring are valuable tools that can and should be utilized to feed conservation efforts, however we must focus our time, energy, and investment on measures that yield conservation outcomes, not "recommendations" that will gather dust in some publication while wild populations continue to decline. We should move forward at the policy level where CITES, the Convention on Biological Diversity, ASEAN, and national governments can be used and mobilized to help protect remaining wild populations, and we must make progress on the ground, initiating decisive actions that will protect turtles and help develop *their* world into a safe environment where they can and will survive in nature.

There is a need to bring focus to what must be done, and to encourage those interested in turtles and their conservation to ask difficult questions about how investments in conservation can really benefit turtles most. Moreover, if we are to really make a difference, we will need to rally our colorful display of personal and organizational flags together and march forward, beneath the banner of turtles.

**Editors Note:** The opinions contained within this piece reflect the author's ideas alone and do not necessarily reflect the position of any organization(s) for which he is affiliated.