



Asian Turtle Conservation Network

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Training Course Focuses on Developing the Next Generation of Turtle Experts

In January the ATCN hosted its first major training course for university students focusing on Vietnam's endangered tortoises and freshwater turtles. Six students from Hanoi National University and Vinh University participated in the seven-day intensive training program held at Cuc Phuong National Park's Turtle Conservation Center (TCC). The students, selected based upon their interest and past experience working with turtles, were provided with a basic introduction to the ecology of Vietnam's 23 tortoise and freshwater turtles species, as well as an overview of the Asian turtle crisis within the Vietnam context.

Moreover, the training focused on building practical field skills amongst the participants that will be useful in carrying out surveys and contributing to the conservation of turtles, such as developing the students' field identification skills, learning basic mapping and navigation (use of compasses and GPS), interview-based survey technique, use of radio telemetry to monitor turtles in their habitat, and methods of trapping, and carrying out timed searches to survey turtles in the field.

The training course was designed to engage the students as much as possible through hands-on learning approaches. For example, the trainees practiced their turtle field identification skills working with examples of some 16 species represented at the TCC. Following discussions on interview methods and a series of role-playing exercises designed to develop the trainees' interview skills, participants conducted interviews in villages outside the park. During the evening, the trainees discussed and analyzed the results of their interviews.

Course participants carried out small focused research projects involving captive turtles at the TCC, the results of which were presented on the last day of the course. They also experimented with trapping in a local wetland, and practiced completing field records and processing turtles for a number of fictitious situations that are commonly experienced in the field.

Course instructors included Bui Dang Phong, Manager of the Turtle Conservation Center at Cuc Phuong National Park, Tim McCormack, research coordinator for the WCS/CMZ Vietnam turtle program, David Emmett of Conservation International's Indo-Burma Program, Vu Thi Quyen, education program director for Education for Nature – Vietnam, and Douglas Hendrie, Wildlife Conservation Society and Cleveland Metroparks Zoo Asia Regional Turtle Conservation Coordinator. The course was the first of what may become regular training programs focused on building interest and expertise in turtles and their conservation amongst university students across the region.

The next scheduled training course at the Turtle Conservation Center in Cuc Phuong will focus on helping turtle experts from Myanmar, Cambodia, and Vietnam design and develop enforcement training programs focused on turtles that will be carried out in their own countries for wildlife protection authorities.

The training course was carried out with the support of the Wildlife Conservation Society, Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, Rufford Foundation, and Conservation International, in addition to technical and training support provided by Cuc Phuong National Park and Education for Nature – Vietnam.

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