



Mauremys annamensis, *Platysternon megacephalum* and *Cuora galbinifrons* of SE Asia © D. Hendrie/WCS

The WCS Hunting & Wildlife Trade Program works:

with governments

with logging
companies

with local
communities

in protected areas

across the wider
landscape

in the policy arena

to ensure that
hunting & wildlife
trade are
sustainable

to ensure the
survival of
species and
the integrity
of ecosystems
on which
humans and
wildlife
depend.

Southeast Asian turtle Trade

WCS’s Hunting and Wildlife Trade Program was established in response to an overwhelming threat to wildlife in tropical forests today: unsustainable hunting and trade in wild animals and their parts. WCS is working to address this critical issue across Africa, Latin America, and Asia. In Southeast Asia, habitat loss is occurring at a rapid rate, posing a grave threat to wildlife. Yet for tortoises and freshwater turtles, the greatest threat to their long-term survival has become exploitation for trade, as animals are sold for food, traditional medicine, pets, and ornaments.

Scale and Dynamics of Turtle Trade

When Chinese currency became convertible in 1989, several other formerly-closed countries of East Asia also became more open to trade. This created a dramatic increase in trade between China and neighboring countries to meet a growing demand for wildlife-based foods and medicines that were formerly beyond the reach of most ordinary people. Based on the most recent available data, at least 13,000 metric tons of live turtles are exported from Southeast Asia to East Asia every year. In 2000, 25 tons of turtles were exported from Sumatra to China *every week*. Turtle trade at this level is not sustainable. Efforts to farm turtles have had some success for species like the Chinese soft-shell (*Pelodiscus sinensis*); however, farming of many other species of turtle is not economically profitable due to their slow maturity, low reproductive output, and slow growth. Farming has other problems, including the possibility of accidental release of alien invasive species which threaten local native species. Farming can also present a cover for illegal laundering activities by which turtles collected in the wild are passed through farms as offspring of captive breeding.

Turtles and their eggs are consumed throughout East and Southeast Asia. In addition, plastrons (the lower ventral shell) and carapaces (dorsal shell) are highly valued in medicine markets. The shell of one rare turtle species, *Cuora trifasciata*, is believed to have cancer-curing properties. High demand and high prices, combined with the little-to-no protection afforded to turtles in the wild means that the long-term survival of many turtle species is now in question.

Highlights of the SE Asian Turtle Program

Countries

- Cambodia
- China
- Indonesia
- Laos
- Malaysia
- Myanmar
- Thailand
- Vietnam

Turtle Status

Of the estimated 72 turtle species native to Southeast Asia, half are endangered or critically endangered.

Acronyms

- NGO: Non-governmental Organization
- IUCN: The World Conservation Union

Partners

- Cleveland Metroparks Zoo
- TRAFFIC
- Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA)



Turtle trade © D. Hendrie/WCS



SE Asia Turtle Program sites



Educating local communities about *Mauremys annamensis*, Vietnam

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WCS Activities

WCS is responding in a variety of ways to the Asian turtle crisis. The issue is complex because the issue is extremely urgent but we must take into account the traditional consumptive uses of turtles and the lucrative economic benefits of the commercial turtle trade. One of the first steps has been to identify priority species and landscapes and use these to develop action plans for each country. In 2000, for example, *Batagur baska* was rediscovered in Cambodia and has now been located on three coastal rivers. The Cambodian Department of Fisheries and WCS have launched an in-situ conservation program that involves local communities in protecting this species and its nesting beaches by training guards to enforce protective regulations and by working with local fishermen to reduce their impacts on turtles.

Efforts are underway to protect the three-keeled box turtle at Cuc Phuong National Park, Vietnam. This has provided opportunities for university students to participate in field research, for forest rangers to undergo training, and for turtle awareness to be incorporated into community-based education programs. Public awareness and education of local communities, visitors, journalists, and students are crucial to the survival of Southeast Asian turtles.

In Vietnam, WCS has carried out turtle-specific training for wildlife protection authorities from 34 protected areas and provinces. WCS has created local language photographic field guides of turtles from Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam and has distributed them to relevant authorities as well as to scientific and conservation organizations in the region. Local language guides have also been produced for China and Myanmar.

Important Next Steps

In addition to the numerous and diverse activities listed above, the Hunting and Wildlife Trade Program plans to:

- Initiate conservation programs for specific priority turtle species throughout the region.
- Develop country working groups comprising people who live and work in the country to provide the foundation for developing turtle conservation initiatives and programs that are both sustainable and locally administered.
- Implement enforcement training on a large scale.
- Develop educational packages for all ages.
- Expand efforts to strengthen national laws as they pertain to turtle conservation and turtle trade.

WCS has launched a model in-situ conservation program that involves local communities in protecting turtles and their nesting beaches.

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For more information

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Hunting and Wildlife Trade
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Mission

The Wildlife Conservation Society's International Conservation program saves wildlife and wild lands by understanding and resolving critical problems that threaten key species and large, wild ecosystems around the world.

WCS Strategies

- Site-based conservation
- Research
- Training and capacity-building
- New model development
- Informing policy
- Linking zoo-based and field-based conservation

12/04

