



Saving the Earth's Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles


Mission Statement

The mission of TCF is to ensure that no species of tortoise or freshwater turtle becomes extinct and that sustainable populations of all species persist and thrive in the wild.



The TCF Strategy

The Turtle Conservation Fund (TCF) was created in 2002 to develop and implement a global conservation action plan to ensure the survival of all tortoise and freshwater turtle species. The TCF partners and a diverse group of individuals and institutions around the globe have committed to making this strategy a success.



Although turtles and tortoises have graced the Earth for 300 million years, today habitat loss and burgeoning demand for turtles as food and as ingredients in traditional medicines threaten their continued existence. Many species of tortoises and freshwater turtles face imminent extinction without swift and effective conservation action.

The Turtle Conservation Fund (TCF) provides the critical funding necessary for facilitating and coordinating global turtle conservation initiatives. Our work involves building strategic partnerships and supporting focused conservation actions, including captive breeding and management programs, protection and management of native populations, field-based conservation biology and applied research, and field and trade surveys. Using scientific information and data, we also determine the conservation status of tortoise or freshwater turtle populations, and develop and implement important safeguards.

Why Turtles and Tortoises Matter

The world's 300 living tortoise and freshwater turtle species are an evolutionary success story. Existing long before dinosaurs walked the earth, they have evolved a remarkable body armor that has remained relatively unchanged and is a testament of their phenomenal ability to survive millions of years of natural selection pressures. Turtles are critically important components of the ecosystems they inhabit, often serving as keystone species and forming complex ecological relationships with other animals and plants. Should turtles perish, the ecosystems that depend on them would be severely damaged as well.

In addition to their extraordinary biological importance, living turtles play an important role in helping us understand the complexities of nature, allowing us to see in a living form

a creature whose closest relatives mostly exist only as fossils in museums. Their wondrous protective bony shell, with variations of colors and markings, along with their many other unique biological characteristics make turtles one of the creatures that continually stimulate generations of young people to appreciate and become intrigued with nature and biology. Tragically, future generations are at risk of losing the opportunity to appreciate and enjoy these remarkable animals.

THE PROBLEM

Turtles Are Under Severe Threat Across the Globe

In 2000, the World Conservation Union (IUCN) identified 300 species of tortoises and freshwater turtles, with an estimated 200 (67%) threatened in some way and requiring conservation action. The situation continues to worsen with increasing habitat loss worldwide, burgeoning demand for turtles as food, medicines, or pets, and the growing impacts of disease and global climate change.

Nowhere are turtles and tortoises more threatened than in Asia, where over half of the continent's 90 species are endangered or critically endangered. The most urgent threat in this part of the world is the virtually uncontrolled trade of turtles and tortoises for food and traditional medicine. Southeast Asia exports tons of live turtles per day to China, creating a staggering average of more than 10 million individual animals brought to market each year. All kinds of species are traded, and all accessible populations are being actively exploited. Turtle populations near China are now severely depleted or gone, and the unsustainable harvest is reaching ever deeper into all surrounding Southeast Asian countries. Beyond Asia, harvest pressures are even beginning to impact turtles in North America, Africa, and other areas.

THE SOLUTION

A Global Action Plan

The TCF partners have developed an Action Plan that offers an achievable science-based strategy for effectively conserving tortoises and freshwater turtles. Specifically, the Plan combines three critical approaches: developing programs for captive breeding, conducting biological surveys and ecological research, and building the scientific, legal, economic, and other capacities necessary to secure effective protection for turtle and tortoise species and their habitats. TCF will be implementing these strategies in all regions where turtles live: Asia, Africa, Australia, the Mediterranean, South America, Meso-America, and North America.

Establishing Assurance Colonies

Critical to TCF's goals is establishing a global network of captive management programs, known as assurance colonies, for captive breeding of the most critically endangered tortoises and freshwater turtles. These vital colonies will maintain and increase the numbers of each species, and will work toward returning endangered turtles to protected native habitats in the wild. Our goal is to establish assurance colonies where species occur, and qualified groups in the United States and Europe will also maintain colonies.

Conducting Conservation Biology Research
Another priority of the TCF is to build critical baseline knowledge of the biology, ecology, distribution, and habitat requirements of turtles. We will contribute further to this foundation by studying the genetics and diseases of turtle and tortoise populations in the wild, and examine how all factors relate to captive breeding and repatriation projects. For the most critically endangered species, this baseline scientific information must be obtained as rapidly as possible while populations remain in the wild under natural conditions. TCF will prioritize and support field surveys, conservation research, and analysis of protected areas, as well as help to determine the policies needed to prevent further losses in the wild.

Building Capacity in Range Countries

The third essential component of TCF's work is building capacity and awareness in countries that need assistance to develop and implement effective conservation strategies. TCF will support enforcement of wildlife regulations, and will help develop education programs that emphasize the value of turtles as part of our natural heritage. TCF will also help establish rescue centers to temporarily house confiscated turtles, provide technical training on captive care, and foster sustainable wildlife use programs where needed. TCF partners and collaborating organizations will work together to identify and create official protected areas that sustain viable wild populations of tortoises and freshwater turtles.

Assurance
Colonies



Conservation
Biology Research



What You Can Do

Despite surviving countless millennia, many turtle and tortoise species face imminent extinction. Without **immediate** intervention, the turtle survival crisis that has already begun will increase to unprecedented levels of severity and risk, and many species will be lost over the next 5 to 20 years. However, this dire situation **can be reversed** in our lifetime, but we need your help. The estimated five-year budget to meet the goals and objectives of the turtle conservation global action plan is \$5.6 million. We invite you to join this urgent campaign to make sure that these wonderful creatures, who have existed since before the dinosaurs, will not disappear.

Through your generosity, together, we will have the opportunity to preserve these endangered creatures. Your important contribution to the TCF will help underwrite the following crucial activities:

- Running operations to rescue turtles that have been confiscated from illegal trade and to move them into assurance colonies,
- Conducting field surveys in remote regions to obtain critical baseline data on little-known species,
- Building facilities to house captive breeding populations of endangered turtles,
- Supporting research to identify species and diversity through genetic analysis,
- Building scientific, legal, and economic capacity in range countries, and
- Providing crucial veterinary care of individual turtles.



Without immediate intervention, the world will experience a turtle survival crisis of unprecedented severity and risk, and many species will be lost over the next 5 to 20 years.



TCF will fund field surveys and conservation biology research and suggest policies needed to prevent further losses in the wild.

Capacity
Building



Please send your contribution to:

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**The Turtle Conservation Fund
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