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## *Lettre n°13*

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**EDITORIAL**

Chers collègues et amis,

Pour cette nouvelle lettre, nous aborderons trois sujets, le Plan National d'Action Cistude, le bilan des Journées Techniques du 9 et 10 décembre 2010 en Brenne, le DVD "la Corse" et ses tortues...

Le PNA n'est pas encore sur le site du Ministère, il n'y a que celui d'Eurotestudo hermanni et celui des tortues marines.

J'ai beaucoup à redire sur ce travail, à commencer par le boycott dont je fais l'objet, ainsi qu'Emys Conservation... Existence : néant... Ne fait pas partie des heureux élus, associations citées, remerciées, rien, inconnu au bataillon... Il a bien fallu pourtant me trouver, le kamikaze de service, l'apprenti expert de l'époque, pour aller au charbon, rédiger le premier dossier pour interdire l'importation des Tortues de Floride, me confier le bébé "Groupe Cistude" de la SHF pendant 18 ans, qui a initié l'intérêt pour la protection de l'espèce et soutenu la plupart des actions actuelles citées dans le PNA...

60 lettres de liaison rédigées depuis janvier 1989, des comptes-rendus divers, l'organisation des Symposiums européens, on sait les trouver les amateurs quand il s'agit de faire le travail associatif bénévole, au détriment de (...plein de choses) leur travail de recherche ou de terrain, on sait leur dire de dégager aussi...

Aux JT de février 2008, j'ai demandé à Marc Cheylan, de m'associer à la relecture du PNA, (autant Cistude que Mauremys). Depuis, aucune nouvelle, j'ai eu du mal à me le procurer, après sa présentation aux JT de décembre dernier par Stéphanie Thienpont et André Miquet, un an après sa validation par le Ministère... Après lecture, en l'état actuel, il y a des erreurs et des désaccords. Je ne me gênerai pas pour critiquer la version définitive, officielle. Connaissant le Ministère français de l'Environnement, je souhaite qu'il soutienne ce PNA, financièrement, mais je ne le jurerai pas. En tout cas, si on rajoute assez de photos, il agrémentera son site Internet... Vont-ils aussi servir, tous ces PNA, à indiquer de façon fine, à tous les ramasseurs de bestioles et de plantes protégées, où aller les chercher ? La réflexion sur le PNA et sa rédaction peuvent, par contre, nous aider à mieux ajuster et amplifier nos actions de terrain et nos travaux de recherche.

Les Journées Techniques ont été comme d'habitude un moment privilégié de retrouvaille ; le niveau des communications, excellent, en progression. Je reste admiratif devant le travail de tous ces jeunes chercheurs mais, toujours un peu inquiet sur leur devenir professionnel et la pérennité de leurs actions.

L'essentiel des communications s'est placé sur le terrain de la gestion des habitats... "Le jardinage..."

On le fait depuis la nuit des temps, les moines en Brenne ne faisaient pas autre chose, à part qu'ils ne le faisaient pas pour sauver une espèce, mais pour se remplir le ventre de poissons pendant les 130 jours de carême... A ce propos, la communication de Marc Cheylan sur le déclin en Languedoc, avec recherche de documents historiques, m'a semblée novatrice. La gourmandise cléricale, la cistude à consommer coûtant plus cher que des truffes, devait susciter des vocations de pêcheurs qui en vidaient les milieux... Triple pêchés, celui de gourmandise, celui de manger gras pendant le carême et celui d'exterminer une espèce qui ne demandait rien à personne... La papauté à Avignon n'a pas dû arranger les choses... Autre communication originale, celle d'Olivier Verneau de l'Université de Perpignan et les vers à ventouses ou crochets, parasites spécifiques au départ, des Cistudes, Mauremys et Trachemys qui se promènent désormais d'une tortue à l'autre... Autre question utile, celle de Catherine Ducaillar et Stéphanie Darblade sur les nouveaux outils pédagogiques... La période touristique estivale et les sorties scolaires donnent l'occasion d'approcher le grand public, il s'agit d'objets à ramener, voir et échanger, de plaquettes mutualisées, de livres, d'expositions...

Cela manque souvent dans les Maisons des Parcs et Syndicats d'Initiative.

*Bonne lecture, Alain Veysset*

Nouveauté DVD :

La Corse. Les tortues de l'Île de beauté. Un film de Frédéric Lavail et Jérôme Maran.

Deuxième opus de la collection "A la découverte de tortues du monde" ce film de 52 minutes, nous montre beaucoup plus que ne le laisse présager son titre... En effet, outre les tortues corses, c'est quasiment toute l'herpétofaune de l'île qui nous est présentée en conditions naturelles. Ne manquez pas non plus les bonus, moins sérieux, mais qui valent le détour !

Un DVD à commander et recommander pour toute vidéothèque naturaliste.

Un DVD disponible à l'adresse : [www.lerefugedestortues.fr](http://www.lerefugedestortues.fr) pour 15 €.

*Thierry Frétey*

**EDITOR'S CORNER**

Dear colleagues and friends,

In this new letter we will tackle three subjects: "the National Action Plan for Emys", the assessment of the "Technical Days" of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of December in Brenne, the DVD "Corsica and its turtles".

The NAP is not yet on the French Ministry of Environment website. You only can find the "Eurotestudo hermanni" NPA and the "Sea Turtles" one.

I have a lot to say about this work. I will start by the boycott concerning Emys Conservation and myself... Existence: nothingness... Is not part of the happy few, the quoted and thanked associations, nothing, unknown... They were very happy to find me, the house kamikaze, the trainee expert at that time, getting to work, writing the first file to stop *Trachemys scripta elegans*' importations... They entrusted me with the "baby" Emys Group of the SHF during 18 years which has introduced the interest for the protection of this specie and supported most of the actions cited by the NAP.

60 link letters written since January 1989, various reports, the organization of European Symposiums... They know how to find amateurs when they have to do the voluntary work to the detriment of (a lot of things...) their research or field job, and they also know how to tell you to clear off...

At the TD of February 2008, I asked Marc Cheylan to be associated to the re-reading of the NAP (as Emys, than Mauremys). Since that moment, no news... It was hard to get it, after the presentation at the TD of last December by Stéphanie Thienpont and André Miquet, one year after the validation by the Ministry... After reading, in the present state, there are mistakes and disagreements. I will not mind to criticize the definitive and official version. Being acquainted with people of the French Ministry of Environment, I hope they will fork out the NAP, but I can't swear it... In any case, if we add enough photos, the NAP will brighten up their website... Are all these NAPs going to be used to indicate, in a thin way, to all collectors of protected creatures and plants, where they are? The thinking about the NAP and the redaction of it can help us to adjust and amplify our field actions and research works.

The Technical Days were, as usual, a special moment of meeting. The communications' level was excellent. I remain admirer of the investment of all these young researchers, but always a bit anxious for their professional future and the permanence of their actions...

The most part of the communications were about habitats' management: "gardening".

We've been doing that for a long time ago. Monks in Brenne used to do the same, not to protect a specie, just to fill their belly with fish during 130 days of Lent. In this connection, the communication of Marc Cheylan about the decline in Languedoc, with research of historical documents, seems innovative to me. The clerical greediness, eatable Emys being more expensive than truffles, probably created vocations of fishers able to empty out the environment... Three sins in one: gluttony, eating fatty food during the Lent and extermination of species which didn't ask anything to anybody...

Another communication was Olivier Verneau's, from Perpignan University, about different worms with suction pads or hooks, specific parasitic at the beginning on Emys, Mauremys and Trachemys and now in nature, rambling from a turtle to another one... Another useful question: Catherine Ducailar and Stéphanie Darblade's, about the new pedagogical tools. The summer tourist period and school trips are real opportunities to approach a large public. Objects to bring back, to see and to exchange, brochures to share, books, expositions... All that stuff often misses in Park Houses or Tourist Information Office.

*Enjoy reading, Alain Veysset*

**ALBUM PHOTOS DES JOURNEES TECHNIQUES (1/3)**



La cistude d'accueil de l'entrée des Journées Techniques



Les cistudes de Brenne du peintre François Desbordes



Catherine Ducaillar et sac à dos cistude pédagogique



Olivier Verneau répond aux questions



Cistudes de démonstration, outil pédagogique

ALBUM PHOTO DES JOURNEES TECHNIQUES (2/3)



Zoey, l'organisatrice



Raphaël, le modérateur



André Miquet, Albert Bertolero et Anthony Olivier



A table avec Bruno Roustan, Laurent Joubert et Marc Cheylan



Restauration appropriée face à l'étang de Bellebouche



**ALBUM PHOTO DES JOURNEES TECHNIQUES (3/3)**



Cornélius De Haan et Claude Nottbaert



Fabien Metaireau en grand débat, au bar des JT



Château du Bouchet et bonde (Maison du Parc)



Étang de la Gabrière, un des plus grand de Brenne

**COLLECTION "A LA DECOUVERTE DES TORTUES DU MONDE"**

**SORTIE DU DOCUMENTAIRE ANIMALIER CONSACRÉ  
AUX TORTUES DE CORSE**

Frédéric Lavail et Jérôme Maran, deux amis naturalistes de longue date, ont décidé de partager leur passion pour le monde vivant en créant la première collection de documentaires animaliers consacrés aux tortues du monde.

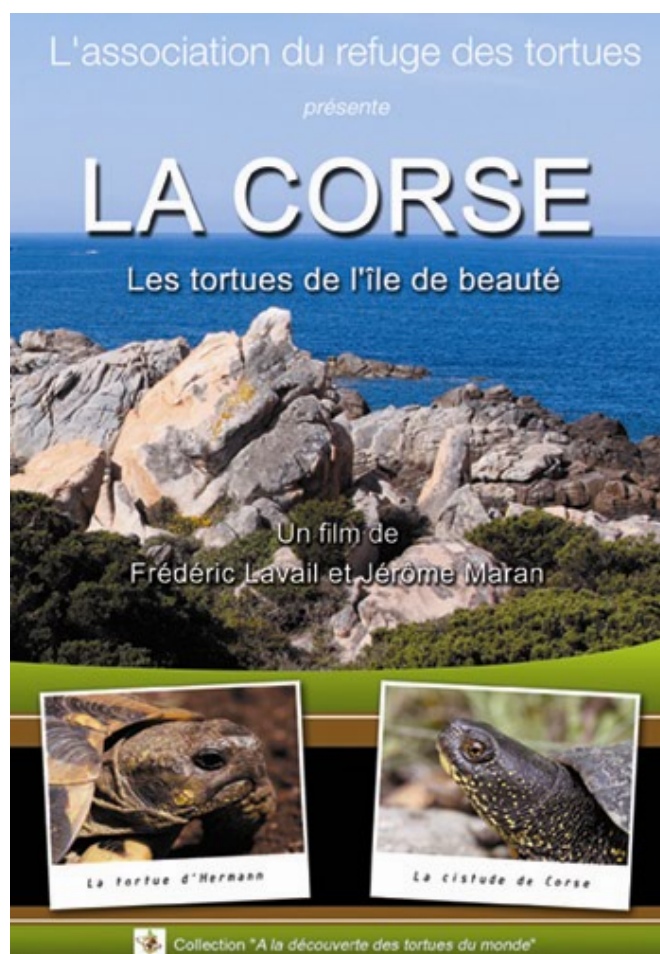
Chaque DVD de la série « À la découverte des tortues du monde » présente un film documentaire d'au moins 52 minutes qui vous permet de découvrir les tortues sauvages dans leur habitat naturel.

« Mieux connaître, pour mieux protéger » représente le fil rouge de cette initiative unique.

En plus du film, les DVD sont agrémentés de différents bonus : les coulisses du tournage, le bêtisier et parfois des courts métrages naturalistes.

Le premier film consacré aux tortues du Maroc est paru en juin 2010. Le second dédié à l'herpétofaune de la Corse est maintenant disponible. Le prix public est de 15 euros/ DVD et 10 euros pour les membres d'une association affiliée à la FFEPT.

Si vous souhaitez contacter les auteurs ou acheter les DVD, n'hésitez pas à vous rendre sur le site Internet [www.tortues-du-monde.com](http://www.tortues-du-monde.com).



## 19 COMMUNES CONCERNEES PAR NATURA 2000

7 janvier 2011 06h00, par Janique Villeneuve



**Les marais de Marennes. PHOTO JANIQUE VILLENEUVE**

Le projet Natura 2000 s'étendra sur un vaste complexe côtier incluant le marais de Brouage, les vasières du Coureau d'Oléron et les marais du nord de l'île d'Oléron. En effet, ces différents sites constituent un ensemble remarquable par la diversité et l'originalité de leurs milieux.

Les 19 communes concernées sont : Beaugeay, Bourcefranc-le-Chapus, La Brée-les-Bains, Le Château-d'Oléron, Dolus-d'Oléron, La Gripperie-Saint-Symphorien, Hiers-Brouage, Marennes, Moëze, Port-des-Barques, Saint-Agnant, Saint-Denis-d'Oléron, Saint-Froult, Saint-Georges-d'Oléron, Saint-Jean-d'Angle, Saint-Just-Luzac, Saint-Pierre-d'Oléron, Saint-Nazaire-sur-Charente et Saint-Sornin.

Ces communes disposent d'un riche patrimoine naturel dont des cordons dunaires, des zones de vasières, des prairies à jas et à bosses structurées par un réseau complexe de fossés d'eau douce à saumâtre.

### Paysage façonné par l'homme

Ces espaces sont le fruit du labour humain réalisé au fil des siècles car les activités économiques ont entraîné un aménagement du paysage : saliculture, agriculture, conchyliculture, chasse ou tourisme. Ces différentes activités ont pour conséquence d'avoir façonné des habitats hétérogènes et des pratiques de gestion spécifiques créant une diversité biologique importante.

### Préservation des espèces

C'est pourquoi ce territoire est classé zone Natura 2000 au titre de deux directives : la directive oiseau et la directive habitat. Plusieurs espèces (faune et flore) doivent alors être préservées : Liparis de Loesel (orchidée des marais), cistude d'Europe (tortue), esturgeon. Des inventaires sont réalisés par des spécialistes : la Ligue pour la protection des oiseaux 17, l'Office national des forêts, l'association Obios (association nationale pour la conservation de la biodiversité) et la Chambre d'agriculture 17 (partie socio-économique).



## 2011 YEAR OF THE TURTLE

Turtle conservation groups in partnership with PARC are designating 2011 as the Year of the Turtle

Why Turtles, and Why Now?

Turtles are disappearing from the planet faster than birds, mammals, and even amphibians. Today, over 40% of turtle species are identified as threatened with extinction; the primary threats are human-caused. However, it's not too late for our turtle heritage to be salvaged. The United States has more endemic turtle species than anywhere on Earth; a turtle biodiversity hotspot. Our careful stewardship can preserve the rare species and keep 'common species common.'

Throughout the year, we will be raising awareness of the issues surrounding turtles through press releases, newsletters, photo contests, and related events. It is our hope that citizens, natural resource managers, scientists, and the pet and food and related industries will work together to address issues and to help ensure long-term survival of turtle species and populations.

Supporting Partners (to date) include (and will not be limited to): Turtle Conservancy, Turtle Survival Alliance, IUCN Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group, US Fish & Wildlife Service International Affairs, Chelonian Research Foundation, Turtle Conservation Fund, AZA Chelonian Taxonomic Advisory Group, SUNY ESF, Virginia Herpetological Society,... and the list keeps growing!

The Chinese calendar depicts 2011 as the Year of the Rabbit, and we are all familiar with the story of "The Tortoise and the Hare." Today, there is in fact a race in progress. It is a race to extinction, and turtles, unfortunately, are emerging in the lead, ahead of birds, mammals, and even amphibians. Turtles are disappearing from the planet faster than any other group of vertebrate animal, with nearly 50% of turtle species identified as "Threatened" with extinction. However, the majority of turtle threats are human-caused, which also means that we can work together to address turtle conservation issues and to help ensure the continued survival of these important animals.

View or download our January Year of the Turtle Newsletter! The first issue of our monthly Year of the Turtle News is packed with information about turtles, and includes an interview with turtle expert, Dr. Carl Ernst, as well as several ways for our readers to get involved in the Year of the Turtle.

Just hatched - the January 2011 Year of the Turtle downloadable calendar, with winning photo by Steven Krichbaum! Congratulations to our Turtle Photo Contest Winner for the month of January, Steven Krichbaum. As we celebrate the "hatching" of the Year of the Turtle in 2011, Steven's photo of an emerging wood turtle hatchling was chosen as January's featured photo out of nearly 60 photos received by the December 20th deadline. More than 150 photos have now been received and all photos will continue to be considered for future calendar months, as well as other YoT products and documents. More information is available at [www.yearoftheturtle.org](http://www.yearoftheturtle.org).

Visit [www.yearoftheturtle.org](http://www.yearoftheturtle.org) to find the Newsletter, calendar and information about our turtle photo contest for upcoming calendar months, our "State of the Turtle" informational report, and a new USA Turtle Mapping Project. Throughout the year, we will be raising awareness of the issues



Raymond Rollinat au Château Nayac, au Blanc

**DEBAT ET ACTUALITE DU COMMERCE MONDIAL DES TORTUES A TEMPE ROUGE**

The Shameful Shell Games Continue  
(Editor-An Article on the Sale of Red-eared Sliders in the U.S. and Overseas. And Their Environmental Impact.)

by David S. Lee The Tortoise Reserve PO Box 7082 White Lake, NC 27614 torresinc@aol.com  
Originally printed in the CHS Bulletin 45(12) 2010 Pg.185-186

It's like a perpetual game of Whack-A-Mole, but with ever advancing levels of play

Red-eared sliders are the most frequently sold turtle in the pet trade, due largely to their bright colors. By the 1960s there were over 150 turtle farms operating in the United States. Currently there are 80 turtle farms in Louisiana alone, where they represent a \$9.4 million a year industry. In most cases these farms are not self-sufficient, and thousands of additional adult sliders are removed from the wild each year to replace senile breeding stock. This ongoing practice has seriously depleted native populations in many areas of the south. In the mid-1970s the U.S. Food and Drug Administration banned the U.S. sales of turtles under four inches because they found the turtles often transmitted salmonella to small children (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 21, Vol. 8:21CFR1240.62). This was at first devastating to the turtle farmers. Their solution was twofold: overseas sales, and finding markets in the U.S. in states where the regulations were not well enforced. For almost every subsequent attempt at regulation of the industry there was a successful countermove by the farms or the dealers. Today over 200,000 farmed pet turtles continue to be sold in this country each year, and nearly 10 million are shipped to inter-national pet markets.

And to keep it interesting a U.S. senator is attempting to push new legislation to reopen the market for red-eared sliders in the U.S. The bill has already passed the senate and if it goes through the unintended effect will be the mass marketing of turtles in addition to the ones hatched on turtle farms. Eggs taken from the wild will be hatched and the young will be sold in any number of venues: street vendors, pet shops, tourist shops, roadside stands, and of course over the Internet. With this proposed law, imports of turtles hatched from eggs dug up in the wild will enter the U.S. as they will no longer need to reach four inches in length prior to shipment. Countries requiring imported or exported turtles to be captive-bred will be swamped with requests for permits to sell "captive-bred" turtles. CITES regulations will be tested to their limits as exporting countries ship boxes of various protected species as "captive-bred." Dropping the 4-inch requirement for import and sales in the U.S. will have conservation consequences for many species of turtles in many countries.

In addition to the health issues and the devastation of native turtle populations as turtle farms' breeding stock was continually replaced, the commercial trade has resulted in large numbers of turtles being released into areas where they do not naturally occur. These sliders unfortunately are one of the most adaptable of turtles. Having a wide ecological tolerance, by the early 1960s they were becoming established as permanent self-sustaining populations throughout the country. With the shift to overseas markets, these turtles also became established globally.

They are on every continent and subcontinent except Antarctica, and even islands like New Zealand, the Bahamas and Cuba now support feral populations of red-eared sliders.

**Biologists in European nations soon discovered that the exotic sliders were competing with their native turtles. Not just food but even basking space was important. Researchers demonstrated that European pond turtles when unable to bask, due to displacement from sunning sites by sliders, could not process food, had decreased growth rates, and became even less capable of competing with the aggressive sliders. When the European Union banned the importation of red-eared sliders, the turtle farmers circumvented this and crossbred them with yellow-bellied sliders and shipped their customized, genetically designed young turtles to Europe.**

Florida recently stopped the sale of red-eared sliders because released pet turtles were becoming established and were competing with native species, so the turtle farms stocked up on different species to produce young turtles for the market. Over time they too will become problems. As of 1 July 2007, red-eared sliders could no longer be sold in Florida, and after 1 January 2008, it became illegal for non-licensed people to have a red-eared slider smaller than four inches in carapace length. The intent of this regulation was entirely different from that of the federal one. Florida considered red-reared sliders to be injurious wildlife, and became concerned about the numbers of discarded pet turtles being released into the state's aquatic systems. Many states have injurious wildlife laws, but Florida is to be applauded for their use of these laws to take a stand against the commercial sales of red-eared sliders. The IUCN lists this turtle among the 100 most dangerous exotic animals in the world, and many countries are now recognizing the red-eared slider as injurious wildlife. Vietnam this year required a turtle farm in that country to return a shipment of 40 tons of red-eared sliders to the U.S.

I was in Daytona Beach this July and visited a few tourist- focused gift shops along A1A. Besides the tables of T-shirts, racks of bikinis, postcards, knickknacks, seashells, dried starfish and seahorses, and live hermit crabs there were sales displays of “Live Baby Turtles.” The turtles all appeared to be fresh-out-of- the-egg hatchlings, though none had an “egg tooth.” I wondered if these were mostly last season’s hatchlings, held dormant in refrigeration for 9 months or so to be ready for the early summer tourist market, a time prior to when the 2010 hatchlings would be emerging from their eggs. If so, this is a shame, as most, though seemingly healthy now, would succumb to organ failure in the months to come. The turtles were not red-eared sliders, they were combinations of hieroglyphic river cooters and crosses of red-eared and yellow-bellied sliders. A few individu- als would be hard to distinguish from pure red-ears, but thus the shops like those in Europe were getting around the ban on red-ear sales. In fact they weren’t sales at all; one needed to pur- chase turtle set-ups---units of various sizes starting at \$18.50 apiece. Technically no turtles were being sold; they were simply given away. The shops assumed there was no regulation against giving the turtles away, so buy the container and other turtle paraphernalia and you get a free turtle. Not a bad business plan considering that the wholesale purchase price of the turtles is about 40–50 cents each. So, what’s next, \$45 condoms and a cute gal who will show you how they are installed and used free of charge?

The potential ecological impact on native Florida turtles and other wildlife is not only just as bad, but has been increased because of the river cooters. Now there are two genera of intro- duced turtles Florida needs to be concerned about. While I did not see any map turtles for sale that day, they are another con- cern, one that can easily slip through the Florida regulations as now written.

Based on the hybrid swarms of hatchling map turtles produced and sold by turtle farmers we know that Grapt- emys readily hybridize. Considering the overall range of the genus, and the number of endemic range-limited species of conservation concern occurring along the Gulf Coast, the poten- tial for released pet map turtles to destroy the genetic integrity of a number of species is high. And keep in mind the resulting problems are not restricted to Florida. These turtles are being sold at vacation destinations and will be widely dispersed by visiting tourists. What becomes of the hatching turtles when they out grow their store-purchased habitats, or live past the point that they are of interest to the children for whom they were purchased? These hatchlings will show up in creeks, ponds and lakes all over the eastern United States. And it has started. This summer a false map turtle was found in Maryland---a released pet trade turtle, one that could hybridize with the state’s native common map turtle, a species of conservation concern. Yet, they can be sold legally in that state because they are not a native species.

Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, for more than a decade has turned a blind eye to enforcement of state and federal regula- tions on the sale of hatchling red-eared sliders. I and others have documented a steady input of unwanted sliders turned into reptile rescue centers and dumped into aquatic systems from North Carolina to Pennsylvania. Owners forfeiting red-eared sliders to rescue groups invariably say they were purchased in gift shops in Myrtle Beach. Near major cities in central North Carolina it is almost impossible to find native yellow-bellied sliders without some amount of red on their necks and heads from intergradation with the introduced turtles from the pet trade. Additionally we are now seeing the creative marketing of farmed turtles. The turtle farms can create turtles that will be under the radar of states with laws prohibiting sales of specific taxa, and ones not allowing sales of any native species. The hybrids lack true names and technically are not native to any state. The possibility of new designer turtles was not considered by the agencies writing the regulations. And the take-home message is that our federal government is not concerned if salmonella infected turtles are sold outside the United States and cause health issues for children in other nations. Florida turtlefarms are still allowed to breed and sell red-eared sliders outside of the state. Are they unconcerned with the ecological havoc that released pets could cause in other parts of the nation? What about the pollution of aquatic systems shared with states adja- cent to Florida?

While many people recognize the problems with simply releasing pets into a local lake, their options are limited. Reptile rescue centers are saturated with unwanted pet red-eared sliders. Each year I turn down several dozen requests from people wanting to find homes for their fast-growing pet sliders. I try to forward them on to people who are into turtle rescues and re- homing them, but most groups will no longer take red-eared sliders. Okay, here is how desperate it is: a decade or so back a consortium of turtle rescue groups got together and found a turtle farm in south Florida willing to take unwanted red-eared sliders. The people shipping the turtles were all well aware that their sliders were going into breeding ponds and the young from these turtles were being put back out on the market. Sort of a circular humanitarian effort I suppose.

Despite a number of exemptions and loopholes it would seem that existing federal statutes would prohibit sales of turtles under four inches to the general public. Selling enclosures with a free baby turtle, while a somewhat of a gray area, would still constitute illegal “public distribution. . . in connection with a business.” In the past dealers have tried putting signs over their live turtle displays saying “sales for educational purposes only” but the FDA does not recognize this as a legitimate loophole. The penalties can be considerable: “ . . . shall be subject to a fine of not more than \$1,000 or imprisonment for not more than 1 year, or both, for each violation, in accordance with section 368 of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 217). More consistent enforcement is needed.

So the overriding question is why can't even seemingly straightforward wildlife regulations be written so that their enforcement can be clearly interpreted while retaining their original intent? Commercial interests are quick to find soft spots in the regulations of various agencies, and they seemingly have most new regulations circumvented by the time they go into effect. For example, Florida allows sales of "color-morphs" such as albino and pastel red-ears in the belief that people will not be releasing the high priced captive-bred strains into the wild. I wonder if the genetically blind red-ears offered for sale by a turtle dealer who advertises on the Internet and in Reptiles magazine, also qualify as high-end stock? Agency response time, reevaluation of the problem, and drafting and passing revised regulations, even when the problems are addressed, take years. And these are just the sales shop issues; think of what is transpiring over the Internet. Or better yet, take a look. Who is regulating that? It is interesting to see that everyone can get behind conservation initiatives that take aim at direct threats to high profile native wildlife. Killing whales or wolves gets attention, yet indirect threats like habitat loss and the introduction of invasive species, while often of far greater consequence than many of the direct issues, are generally met with complacency both by the public and by government agencies.

Some Correction and Opinions on the Article "The Shameful Shell Game" From Mark Feldman of New Zealand. (Editor-Mr. Feldman is a turtle researcher who has lately been doing a lot of research on the chemical inducement to turtle egg-laying. He has been apply to do this research with the help of the Turtle Farms mentioned in the article who supply him with turtles and space to do set up his lab. If this makes him a biased or expert who can respond to the errors, and there were errors, is us to you, the reader.)

Dear HerpDigest,

Just recently HerpDigest published an article called the "Shameful Shell Game." Many facts in the article were outdated and there were errors of interpretation as well.

1. "...there are 80 turtle farms in Louisiana alone." There were actually 48 farms still in business in early 2010 but probably less now because they are going out of business at a rapid rate. They are going out of business because the Chinese are purchasing fewer turtles each year as they build up their breeding stock and compete directly with the American farms. American turtle farmers that took out bank loans to enter the "boom" during the 1980s-early 1990s when the Chinese were buying hatchlings for over a dollar each (price now around 20 cents) have suffered the most. The older farms, with no loans and a wealth of experience have done better.
2. "...these farms are not self sufficient and thousands of adult sliders are removed from the wild each year to replace senile breeding stock."

The situation is actually that there is a glut of breeding stock. This is why a shipment of 40 tons of ADULT red-ears was sent to Vietnam this year. (Editor-Which Vietnam refused and send back to the U.S.- Sliders are illegal to export to Vietnam and condition of turtles was unacceptable.) These turtles were breeders from the USA that were surplus and no longer wanted. The decline in the industry and bankruptcy of the farms has resulted in the release of many thousands of adult breeders and the butchering of others for food to be sold in the Chinese communities in NY and California.

Turtles do not become "senile." They breed into old age. I have seen thousands of animals that have been on farms for over 40 years and are still laying several clutches a year.

Turtles are resourceful animals and escape frequently from turtle farms. If you tour wild areas around the farms you will note large numbers of turtles on the roadsides during nesting season. It is true that these animals do have the potential to alter the genetic pool of the local turtles. Whether this is more than an academic problem remains to be seen.

3. "Today over 200,000 farmed pet turtles continue to be sold in this country each year and nearly ten million are shipped to international pet markets."

The legitimate trade in over 4 inch farmed turtles in the USA is about 60,000 per year. Annual exports of hatchlings vary widely. Using the LEMIS date (which is the best we have but not really accurate) there were 14.8 million exports last year but almost 2/3 of those were for the food trade in Asia, not for pets. (Editor-Question where did those 14.8 million turtles come from the farms or wild, as their is a large business in catching wild turtles and sending them to China according to Jeff Miller of the Center for Biological Diversity).

4. "Eggs taken from the wild be hatched and the young will be sold in any number of venues."

Taking eggs from the wild is seldom worthwhile. Such eggs need to be gathered within the first 24 hours or after three weeks to avoid mortality. It is far more efficient to use farmed animals where the hatching rate is 85%. Hatchling turtles that end up being sold illegally in the USA almost always come from back-yard farmers that produce a thousand hatchlings or less a year. No big farmers would risk their business to get involved in this illegal trade.

5. "The IUCN lists this turtle among the 100 most dangerous."

This is true but ill deserved. Red-ears are NOT super turtles. Like any other animal they have strict requirements in order to survive and reproduce. Buddhist countries like Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam buy large numbers of hatchlings to be released during religious ceremonies. This has to cause problems; if you release a million hatchling red-ears a year there's bound to be an effect even if they can't reproduce or survive for very long.

6. "They are on every continent...and even islands like New Zealand, the Bahamas and Cuba now support feral populations of red-eared sliders."

There are no reproducing feral populations of red-ears in New Zealand. Adults that are released can survive for a few years but inevitably die from shell disease and starvation because our winters are too warm and summers too cool. There are tiny areas north of Brisbane, Australia where the environment is more suitable for red-ears and they may reproduce there in artificial impoundments. However, the bulk of the country is too dry for the eggs to hatch. This is why Australian turtles have hard shelled eggs.

There are areas in Europe (Southern France) where red-ears can reproduce and do compete to variable degrees with the native pond turtle but there are many other areas in Europe where that is not the case. Again, red-ears are not super turtles; they usually end up surviving the longest in ponds in parks and where local turtle populations have been extinguished already.

7. "When the European Union banned the importation of red-eared sliders the turtle farmers circumvented this and cross-bred them with yellow bellied sliders and shipped their customized, genetically designed young turtles to Europe."

There's some truth here. With the ban of red-ears in the EU, American turtle farmers began exporting yellow-bellied and cumberland sliders. These animals do interbreed with red-ears and crosses are produced but it is not purposeful since the pure bred yellow bellied and cumberland sliders can be legally imported into the EU anyway. Most farmers isolate their cumberlands and yellow bellies from the red-ears because they are of higher value in the pet trade.

"Based on the hybrid swarms of hatchling map turtles produced and sold by turtle farmers we know that Graptemys readily hybridize."

It is true that map turtles interbreed on turtle farms (they can even produce off-spring with red-ears) but it is also true that they interbreed in the wild.

The real issue that needs to be addressed is whether or not people are going to be allowed to keep turtles as pets. If we want to have a society where people can have pet turtles, than turtle farms are the most efficient way to produce them. On a farm 85% of the eggs are hatched successfully but in the wild less than 5% of the eggs survive long enough to make it to the water. A well run turtle farm requires no additions to the adult stock since they can produce their own breeders in 4-5 years at very little additional expense. Breeders taken from the wild require 2-3 years to acclimate to the captive environment of a turtle farm and lay few, if any, eggs in that time. So farmers have little to lose by breeding their own stock.

The state of Louisiana has developed a protocol to prevent the transmission of salmonella via hatchling turtles. It is very effective. However, it does not prevent a pet turtle from getting salmonella from the food (raw chicken) it is fed or proximity to other pets (chickens, donkeys, cows, etc). Recent attempts to eliminate salmonella from chicken eggs in the USA may help to solve this problem.

It would be a real shame if young people could not keep pet turtles. I'm sure that all of us had herps as pets when we were young and that has added a great deal to the quality of our lives. It is my view that we should ban the wholesale capture of wild turtles throughout the United States and support active turtle farming so we can do as little damage to the natural populations as possible.

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