

6th August 2014



Asian Turtle Program

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Photo shows the large *Rafetus swinhoei* hunted in 1993 in Tho Xuan District, Thanh Hoa province using a set of hooked lines.

Ex-softshell hunter becomes a conservationist

In the 1980 and 1990's Mr Nguyen Van Nhan living in Thanh Hoa province of Vietnam was well known in his local community as a hunter of giant softshells. These were Swinhoe's Softshell Turtle (*Rafetus swinhoei*), better known in Vietnam as the Hoan Kiem Turtle. They are now considered the world's rarest turtle with only four animals known in existence. Using a technique of harpoons and long baited hook lines to ensnare the giant animals he claims to have caught over 20 individuals in his lifetime.

At the time Mr Nhan did not know the species was rare and it was caught and sold locally with the same price as fish. It has been the case at many locations for this giant species in Vietnam that they have been hunted to local extinction before people became aware that they were rare or important. Now Mr Nhan is working with a conservationist from the Asian Turtle Program (ATP) to monitor the lakes he once used to fish and is hopefully that more animals of the species can be found and protected.



Mr Nhan an Ex-*Rafetus* hunter shows off the hooks he used to catch the species in the 1990's

Press release by: Timothy McCormack - ATP