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A photograph of the Hoan Kiem Turtle from July 2015 -
By Nguyen Tai Thang – ATP

Can the legend of Hoan Kiem Live On?

It is with great sadness that Hanoi says farewell to a legend and national treasure. Late on the afternoon of the 19th of January 2016 the greatly revered Hoan Kiem Turtle was found dead in central Hanoi's Hoan Kiem Lake. The old male turtle that died yesterday was often referred to as 'Cu Rua' which means 'Great Grandfather Turtle' was the large individual of the Swinhoe's Softshell Turtle (*Rafetus swinhoei*), measuring approximately 130cm in length and weighed an estimated 170kg. His age was unknown but could have exceeded 100 years. His death leaves only three known individuals of this species alive.

With passing of the Hoan Kiem Turtle in Hanoi many people are now considering the future of the species and what should be done. From a conservation and scientific perspective a number of approaches are available that could result in the long term restoration of the species and poten-

tially allow the legend of the giant turtles in Hoan Kiem to return one day.

Cryogenic preservation of tissue from the Hoan Kiem Turtle for possible future cloning.

The technology of cloning has come on greatly in recent years, indeed the process has come into commercial use already with pet owners using a service to clone dogs and other animals. If swift action is taken viable tissue could still be collected, this is time critical as the longer the animal has been dead the more the cells degrade and the chance for successful cloning becomes less. Small samples 1cm³ piece of tissue from the trachea, heart and testies are needed. Expertise and equipment does exist in Hanoi to undertake this tissue collection and have offered to collect and preserve the necessary specimens. Taking and storing this tissue now would provide some future potential to restore the Hoan Kiem Turtle in the future.

It is by no means a simple process and the scientific techniques and technology is still new but should be considered as few other options are left for such a rare species. In a few years we expect to see advances in this field of science. So, can the legend of Hoan Kiem live on? The answer, with the help of science, is yes possibly.

By Tim McCoramck – Asian Turtle Program of Indo-Myanmar Conservation
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For further information, please contact:

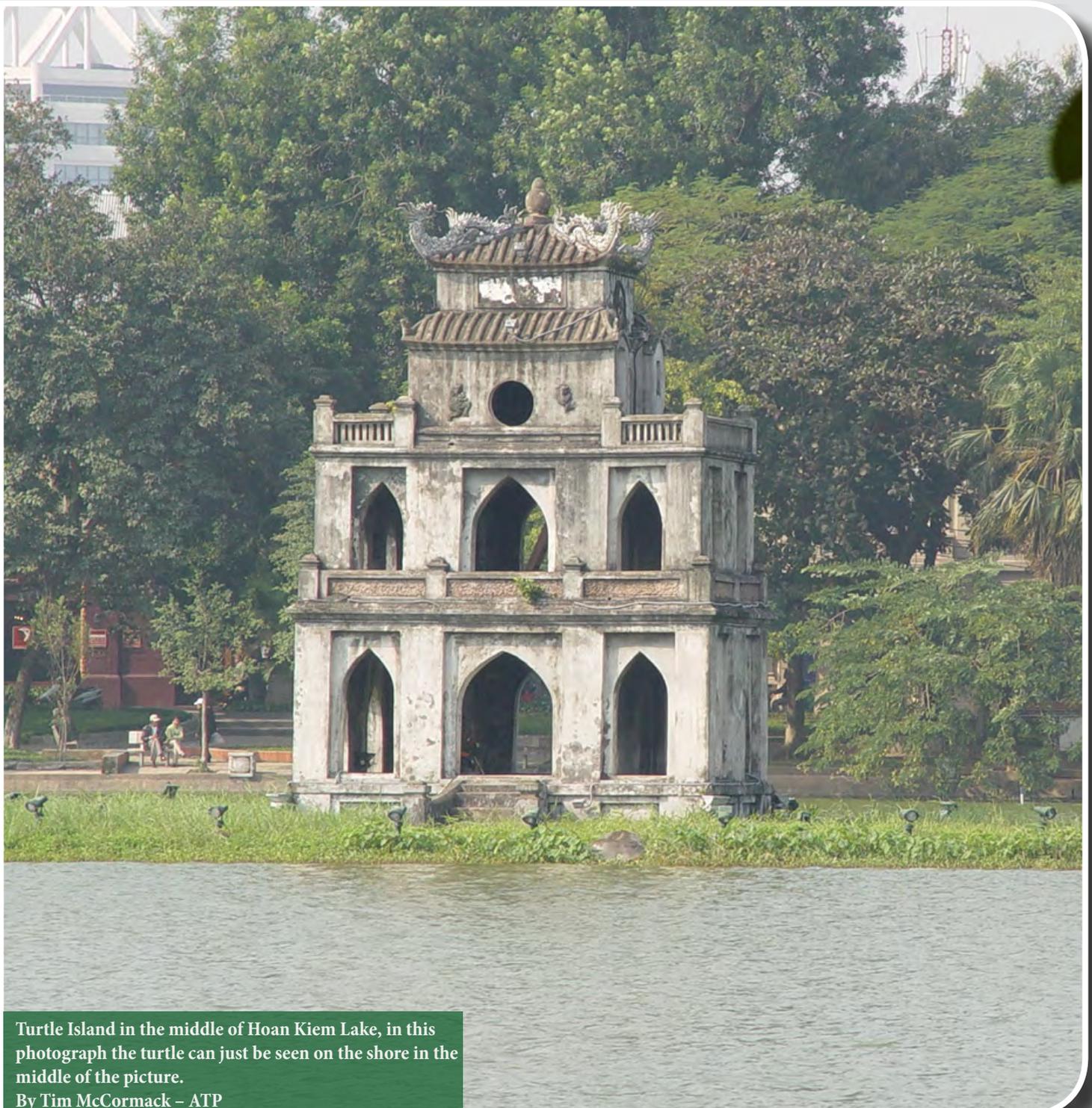
Asian Turtle Program - Indo-Myanmar Conservation
Room 1806, C14 Bac Ha Building, To Huu street,
Nam Tu Liem district, Hanoi, Vietnam
PO Box 46

Tel: +84 (0) 4 7302 8389

Email: info@asianturtleprogram.org

Website: www.asianturtleprogram.org

Facebook: www.facebook.com/AsianTurtleProgram



Turtle Island in the middle of Hoan Kiem Lake, in this photograph the turtle can just be seen on the shore in the middle of the picture.

By Tim McCormack – ATP