



Asian Turtle Program Indo - Myanmar Conservation



Indo-Myanmar
Conservation

Protecting today so we can see tomorrow...

Keep up to date

For more current news and updates on tortoise and freshwater turtle conservation in Asia, visit our website: www.asianturtleprogram.org

Habitat Enrichment for the World's Most Endangered Turtle

During years of observation of Swinhoe's Softshell Turtle (*Rafetus swinhoei*) at Dong Mo Lake (Hanoi, Vietnam), the Rafetus team has undertaken a number of activities to improve the habitat for the species, widely recognized as the world's rarest turtle species. We have already established a 7ha no fishing zone in a core area of the lake and build a nesting sandbank on a small island in the lake. But in 2019 we added to the existing plan to enrich the turtle's habitat through the addition of floating grass and bamboo rafts to provide basking opportunities for the turtle/s, particularly in areas where staff of the ATP/IMC have occasionally seen the species basking on the no fishing zone boundary ropes or bamboo platforms built by local fishermen to encourage fish breeding and rearing. The first floating raft was created in the summer of 2019 with the help of three students from Hong Kong, working as part of an Ocean Park Conservation Foundation (OPCF) grant. Since then, more rafts have been made and it is hoped that these new floating micro-habitats will provide the best opportunity to document Rafetus at Dong Mo.

Five months after completion of the floating rafts, we have noticed an increase in the frequency in which the turtle appears in the area containing the rafts. The turtle has been witnessed by ATP staff supporting itself on the grass and spending hours basking in the sun, several times so far, and local fishermen have also reported observing the animal more frequently in this zone.

For instance, in March 2020, the turtle was observed 27 times in the area near the floating rafts (of the total 28 observations in Dong Mo



Since creating the floating rafts, Swinhoe's Softshell Turtle (*Rafetus swinhoei*) has been observed frequently in the area. © Nguyen Van Trong - ATP/IMC.

lake by both ATP and local fishermen). In comparison, in March 2019, before the rafts were made, the turtle was observed 4 times in this same zone (of the total 7 observations). As an added bonus for the lake and local fishermen, the raft is believed to be an ideal place for fish to lay eggs to help regenerate aquatic resources.

In March 2020, staff on the lake managed to get photographs of the Rafetus sitting, mostly submerged, on the side of the first raft that was produced by staff and the visiting students!

If you would like to support our Rafetus work we are trying to find \$5,000 to make repairs to the nesting beach, which loses sand each year as the lake water levels fluctuate, construct some more floating platforms and look at building a floating nesting beach.

We would like to thank Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund

(CEPF), IUCN, the Turtle Conservation Fund (TCF), the British Chelonia Group (BCG), Columbus Zoo, Auckland Zoo, Birdlife International, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA), the Zoological Society of London (ZSL), the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund, Ocean Park Conservation Foundation (OPCF), the Browse Poster UK, Centre for Resources and Environmental Studies (CRES), Education for Nature (ENV), Washington State University, USA as well as a number of private donors for supporting our Rafetus work. We would also like to thank the authorities in Vietnam, the Forest Protection Department (FPD), Fisheries Department, the Biodiversity Conservation Agency (BCA) of Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MoNRE).

For further information please contact:

Asian Turtle Program - Indo-Myanmar Conservation

Room 1806, C14 Bac Ha Building, To Huu road, Nam Tu Liem Dist., Hanoi, Vietnam

PO Box 46 - Hanoi International Post Office

Tel: +84 (0) 24 7302 8389

Email: info@asianturtleprogram.org

Website: www.asianturtleprogram.org

Facebook: www.facebook.com/AsianTurtleProgram



Swinhoe's Softshell Turtle (*Rafetus swinhoei*) was photographed resting on the floating raft and sunbathing. © Nguyen Van Trong - ATP/IMC.



While the floating raft created by ATP is green all year round. © Nguyen Van Trong - ATP/IMC



Floating rafts planted by fishermen are ruined after the hard winter. © Nguyen Van Trong - ATP/IMC

An Alliance for Rafetus Conservation has now been formed with the ATP/IMC, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA), Global Wildlife Conservation (GWC) and Centre Resources and Environmental Studies (CRES). Together we believe the species can be saved.

Press release: 13th May 2020

Press release by: Nguyen Tài Thang & Jack Carney (ATP/IMC)