



Asian Turtle Program Indo - Myanmar Conservation



Indo-Myanmar
Conservation

Protecting today so we can see tomorrow...

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Orlitia is a female Malaysian Giant Turtle (*Orlitia borneensis*), native to Malaysia and Indonesia. © Nguyen Thu Thuy (ATP/IMC).

“What the Shell am I doing in Vietnam?”

Meet Orlitia. Orlitia is an endangered Malaysian Giant Turtle (*Orlitia borneensis*) who has ended up on the wrong side of Asia.

Likely due to the illegal wildlife trade, she has found herself on quite an adventure. Hauled out by a fisherman from Suoi Hai lake in Ba Vi district, Hanoi, Vietnam in November 2017, she was initially thought by local fishermen to be a legendary Hoan Kiem Turtle (*Rafetus swinhoei*). This is a species historically found in lakes in this area and linked to a 15th-century legend that bestowed magical powers to a group of animals of the same species that occurred in Hanoi's central Hoan Kiem Lake, a population that sadly no longer survives. Believing that Orlitia would bring him good fortune, the fisherman had been worshipping her.

The fisherman sold the turtle back to the lake owner who released it back into the lake; believing he was doing something good for conservation and the animal. However, following up on the case, the

Asian Turtle Program (ATP) of Indo-Myanmar Conservation (IMC) was able to determine that the animal was not the same species as the Hoan Kiem Turtle, but was actually a Malaysian Giant Turtle (*Orlitia borneensis*), a species not even native to Vietnam that must have arrived through the



This species is the largest hard-shelled species in Asia!
© Samuel Tippetts.

illegal wildlife trade and somehow been released or escaped into Suoi Hai Lake. With cold winters in northern Vietnam, it is far too cold for this species which occurs in the more tropical rivers of Malaysia and Indonesia.

Fortunately, in January 2018, Orlitia was recaptured by another fisherman and the ATP/IMC, along with the government, rescued her and were able to transfer her to the Turtle Conservation Centre (TCC) of Cuc Phuong National Park to be cared for.

Efforts have been made by the ATP/IMC and the TCC to coordinate with the Malaysian Turtle Conservation Society and TRAFFIC in Malaysia, to transfer her home to Malaysia either for release into a national park or to join a governmental breeding program. However, we have been unable to do this so far, and a temporary greenhouse was built at the TCC to help Orlitia through the first winter in the outdoor pond she is currently housed in, but ideally, something more permanent is needed.

The ATP/IMC is always seeking to raise support for new developments, rescues and releases and, in the case of Orlitia, hopefully, a return to her native country. If you would like to support ATP/IMC's work, please visit: <https://asianturtleprogram.org/donate> or donate to our PayPal: support@asianturtleprogram.org.

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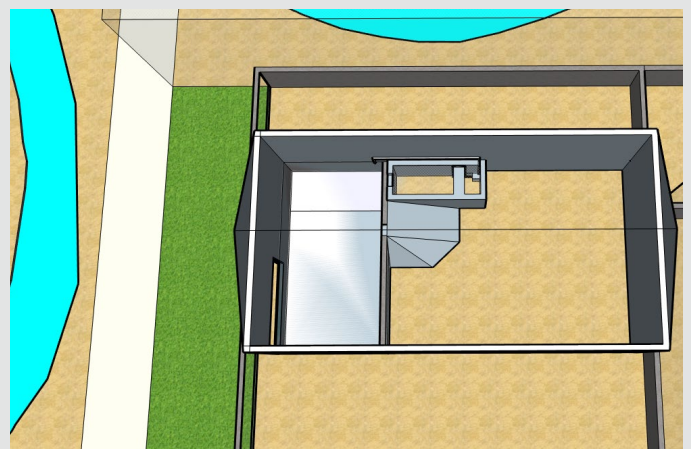


Orlitia is safe now at the TCC after finding her way to Vietnam and being captured multiple times by fishermen, but we still aim to repatriate her in the future.

© Jack Carney (ATP/IMC)



Orlitia's pond is contained within the homemade greenhouse in the winter. © Jack Carney (ATP/IMC)



One of several possible options is to build up the existing walls of the pond to make a deeper pool and extend walls further back to enclose an area within a sheltered house, with a door entry for keepers. © Jack Carney (ATP/IMC).