



Asian Turtle Program Indo - Myanmar Conservation



Indo-Myanmar
Conservation

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A Bourret's Box Turtle is feeding on an earthworm at the TCC. © Do Vu Loi.

The Turtle Conservation Centre during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought numerous changes and challenges to life all over the world and this is no less true than for the countless wildlife conservation projects that operate globally. At the start of the pandemic, illegal hunting and trade of wildlife was predicted to slow in response to the news that the virus most likely originated from wet markets with many different species crowded together. However, the number of animals we are seeing in the trade is still high and these threats continue to put pressure on wild populations and threaten endangered species, in particular tortoises and freshwater turtles. In Vietnam, the Asian Turtle Program (ATP) of Indo Myanmar Conservation (IMC) has been working closely with Cuc Phuong National Park to operate Turtle Conservation Centre (TCC) safely and efficiently during this difficult period.

In 2020, Vietnam was fortunate, through due to a strong response to COVID-19 with early travel restrictions and lockdowns, to get through the year with very few cases. At the TCC, 202 tortoises and freshwater turtles were confiscated and rescued, including 122 native endangered box turtles i.e. Malayan Box Turtles (*Cuora amboinensis*), Indochinese Box Turtles (*Cuora galbinifrons*), Bourret's Box Turtles (*Cuora bourreti*), Southern Vietnamese Box Turtles (*Cuora picturata*) and Keeled Box Turtles (*Cuora mouhotii*).

In more positive news, four release trips were conducted in 2020, returning 255 turtles and tortoises to the wild, including 66 Four-eyed Turtles (*Sacalia quadriocellata*), 128 Big-headed Turtles (*Platysternon megacephalum*), 11 Indochinese Box Turtles, and 50 Bourret's

Box Turtles. Additionally, 400 hatchlings were born in 2020 from 12 different species: Malayan Box Turtles, Indochinese Box Turtles, Bourret's Box Turtles, Keeled Box Turtles, Black-breasted Leaf Turtles (*Geoemyda spengleri*), Elongated Tortoises (*Indotestudo elongata*), Vietnamese Pond Turtles (*Mauremys annamensis*), Spotted Softshell Turtle (*Pelodiscus variegatus*), Four-eyed Turtles, Chinese Stripe-necked Turtles (*Mauremys sinensis*), and Black Marsh Turtles (*Siebenrockiella crassicollis*). It should be noted that we did not hatch some species, or reduced numbers in others, due to challenges in releasing of certain species, including the Vietnamese Pond Turtle.

In early 2021, Vietnam experienced a strong resurgence of COVID-19 throughout the country and many restrictions were put in place. Since then, Cuc Phuong National Park has been closed to visitors, and TCC activities have focused on animal rescue, care and release as well as construction of new enclosures for priority species.

From January to August 2021, 122 turtles were rescued to the TCC from 10 confiscations and some voluntary handovers from the public. The most confiscated species are still Big-headed Turtles (82/122) and the Box Turtle group (genus *Cuora*). Three releases have been carried out so far

comprising 25 Keeled Box Turtles, 28 Big-headed Turtles and 3 Impressed Tortoises (*Manouria impressa*), other trips have been disrupted by a COVID-19 outbreak which began in late April 2021 and has been difficult to contain, but we are still hoping to undertake these later this year.

With no visitors to the centre, staff took the opportunity to progress with various developments. First, an improved staff area with a kitchen and restroom and a new food preparation area for animals was completed in early 2021. Currently, new enclosures for *Cuora* Box turtles and Big-headed Turtles are nearing completion which will provide more, suitable housing for rescued animals; these enclosures have been possible thanks to the generous support from our donors.

Despite the impact of COVID-19, the TCC team is still working hard and is dedicated to the conservation of turtles of Vietnam. We still require support for improved enclosures for many endangered species and for intensive rescue and care efforts to help them get back to the wild. Please join us to save Vietnam's turtles and tortoises and head over to our website to make a donation: <https://asianturtleprogram.org/donate/>. Thank you!



Indochinese Box Turtle (*C. galbinifrons*) hatchling at the TCC. © Thuy Nguyen – ATP/IMC



A new Big-headed Turtle enclosure is nearing completion and will be ready in September 2021 after the drain system and waste water tank are built.

© Thuy Nguyen – ATP/IMC.

We are grateful to the Cuc Phuong National Park and local partners for their support during the pandemic, to Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, Saint Louis Zoo, the Fondation Segré Conservation Fund, Thrigby Hall Conservation Fund, the Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA) and Thanh Truong Loc Construction Co., Ltd., and all of the donors and individuals who support our work, and to other partners who have contributed along the way.



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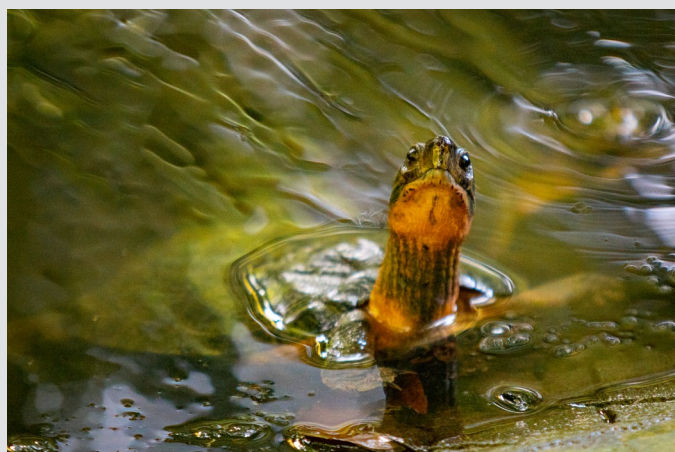


Keeper Luong Nguyen collects eggs of the Black Marsh Turtle in one the TCC's wetland enclosures.

© Thuy Nguyen – ATP/IMC

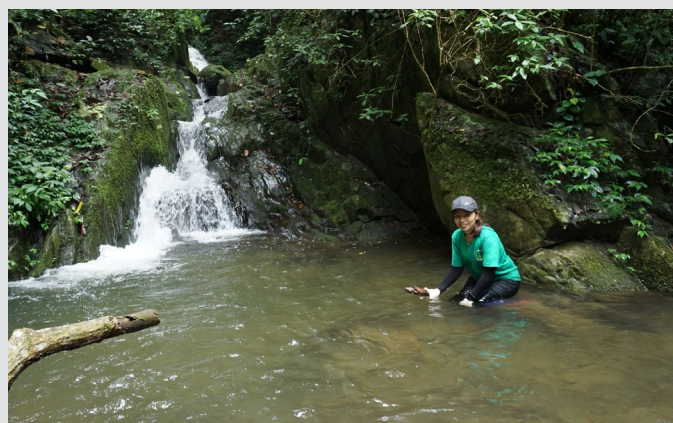


These Big-headed Turtles were rescued from Kon Tum province in central Vietnam, following a long return journey. © Nguyen Duc Luong – ATP/IMC



An Eastern Black-bridged Leaf Turtle (*Cyclemys pulchristriata*) enjoys a swim in its enclosure at the centre.

© Ninh Dai Vuong



The ideal habitat for the Big-headed Turtle during the release trip in 2020. © Hang Tran - ATP/IMC.