

TURTLE POETRY

Editorial Introduction. — This section is devoted to poetry involving turtles, representing either reprinted previously published or new unpublished material. We encourage our readers to submit poetry or songs for consideration, either their own material or work by other authors. Poems may be submitted to Anders G.J. Rhodin, Chelonian Research Foundation, 168 Goodrich Street, Lunenburg, MA 01462.

Our desire is to share with our readers the beauty and wonder of turtles as expressed through the art of the poem or song. In the sense that the relationship between man and turtles is multifaceted, so too is turtle poetry. The poems we publish here will reflect that complexity, from poems of pure admiration for the creatures themselves to others reflecting the utilization of turtles and their products. Some poems will reflect man's use of the turtle for sustenance, others will stress man's need to preserve and protect turtles. Some will deal with our emotional interactions with turtles, others will treat turtles light-heartedly or with seeming disrespect, but all will hopefully help us to better understand both the human and the chelonian condition, and remind us that the turtle holds a sacred place in all our hearts.

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Population Density Studies

MARIAN L. GRIFFEY¹

Scientists gather in a smallish room,
lay their years of labor and hearts' dreams in the video carousel
and flash them flat against the unfeeling screen.
Each has a goal: *To develop a range of protection.*
Gopher tortoise; box turtle; salamander;
alligator; black bear; white-footed mouse
The room is not large enough to hold the list.
All are worthy of the measure of life given them by these caring people.
Each has a need far greater than any had imagined,
a range farther reaching than lofty man has ever seen before.

Teachers meet in a shrinking house,
prop their lives of dedication and ideals against a world grown—overnight—unknown.
Each has a hope: *To build a safe place for children.*
Black; White; Hispanic; Native American;
mulatto; Latino; boy; girl
The union is not strong enough to hold the list.
All are worthy of the effort to make a life free from hunger, fear, oppression.
Each has a spark for dreaming and an appetite for greater things;
but, their range of protection needs further boundaries
than mortal mind has yet conceived.

Editorial Comment. — This poem evokes for me the sense of urgency and frustration that many of us feel in our conservation and protection efforts, as we face the mounting evidence of overwhelming and increasing threats to those species (or children) with whose care we have been entrusted. How can we ever do enough to save them all? How can we ever reverse the trends and provide safe havens for our charges? Whether they be turtles or tortoises, other animal species, or human children, they are all our charges, dependent on us for their well-being and secure futures. How do we define and fulfill our responsibilities? How do we provide protection? The answers are ever harder, the challenges ever greater, the needs ever more encompassing. Some might ask, why carry on? Why fight for the right of species to survive? We might as well ask, why fight for our own right to survive? Our lives are inextricably tied to those of the species that surround us and we can no sooner give up on their survival than we can on our own. All our needs are far greater than any had imagined, but somehow we must all seek solutions.

¹ Composed 1997