

# TURTLE POETRY

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*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— This section is devoted to poetry involving turtles, representing either reprinted previously published or new unpublished material.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 Wallace J. Nichols, School of Renewable Natural Resources, Wildlife Ecology, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721 or 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.

*Chelonian Conservation and Biology*, 1997, 2(3):456  
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## Ancient Ones

GRACE S. McLAUGHLIN<sup>1</sup>

You — who we name tortoise —	They brought new four-leggeds in great numbers who ate your food and trampled your burrows and nests.
Ancient ones, you carry the weight of the world on your backs.	Machines came that tore the land crushed your families and homes.
From your burrows, you watched the mountains rise and the seas recede, the giant mammals disappear and the condors soar less, the two-legged ones arrive.	From your burrows, you watched.
For 10,000 years they named you sacred — honored your presence, your strength, your persistence.	Some two-leggeds grew in wisdom And began to watch And to care. They learned about your lives And protected your homes They moved the four-leggeds And kept machines away.
Then, the two-leggeds changed. The new two-leggeds no longer named you sacred but killed for no reason and did not honor tortoise.	Once again, they name you sacred and honor tortoise.  And you, ancient ones, Who carry the weight of the world on your backs From your burrows, You watch.

*Editorial Comment.* — This poem was presented at the Conference on Health Profiles, Reference Intervals, and Diseases of Desert Tortoises on 3 November 1996 at Soda Springs, California. It describes the plight of the desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*).

<sup>1</sup> Composed 1 November 1996  
Submitted by John L. Behler