



The Turtle Conservation Fund: Providing Strategic Action Planning and Funding Support for Conservation of the World's Most Endangered Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles

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Over the last several years, the Turtle Conservation Fund (TCF) has gained notoriety as one of the world's leading turtle conservation support organizations. The TCF has been successful in helping to identify, prioritize, promote, support, and provide a leadership role in collaborative global turtle conservation efforts and opportunities focused on the world's most endangered tortoises and freshwater turtles. The TCF has been highly successful with its grants program, by supporting needed turtle conservation projects and programs worldwide.

Since the founding of the TCF in 2002, 268 grant proposals have been received, of which 97 (36%) have been funded. Total requests have been received for \$1,442,317 in funding, with a total TCF disbursement of \$446,159 (31%) in awards granted. The average award was for \$4,600, with support ranging from \$1,000 to \$10,000. Of the TCFs "Turtles in Trouble: The World's Top 25 Most Endangered Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles – 2007," projects representing 21 (84%) have been funded. Of the TCFs 42 Target Species (2008 list), projects representing 28 (67%) have been supported. Of the 68 taxa listed by the IUCN as Critically Endangered (CR) or Endangered (EN), the TCF has supported projects for 43 (63%). These Top 25, CR, EN, and Target Species figures do not include calculation of support provided

for facilities or broad projects that impact additional species. In the first of two funding cycles of 2010, the TCF received an additional 31 grant support proposals totaling about \$175,000.

With the TCFs global perspective, grants were awarded to projects conducted in 37 countries. Awards were given to projects in Australia, Bangladesh, Belize, Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, Cambodia, Cayman Islands, China, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Iran, Jamaica, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mexico, Myanmar, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Puerto Rico, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Turkey, and Vietnam. Such a broad geographic distribution of funds reflects the TCFs mounting impact on international turtle conservation.

Of the 37 countries where the TCF has provided support, projects in 10 countries have received funding, from five to 10 grants in each. These countries, and the Critically Endangered turtle species in them, have especially needed this extra focus and support and have benefited the most from directed TCF funding efforts. These focus countries are: China (10 funded projects), Madagascar, Myanmar, and Vietnam (nine each), Indonesia and Colombia (eight each), Cambodia (seven), India (six), and Mexico and the Philippines (five each). Several other countries have received

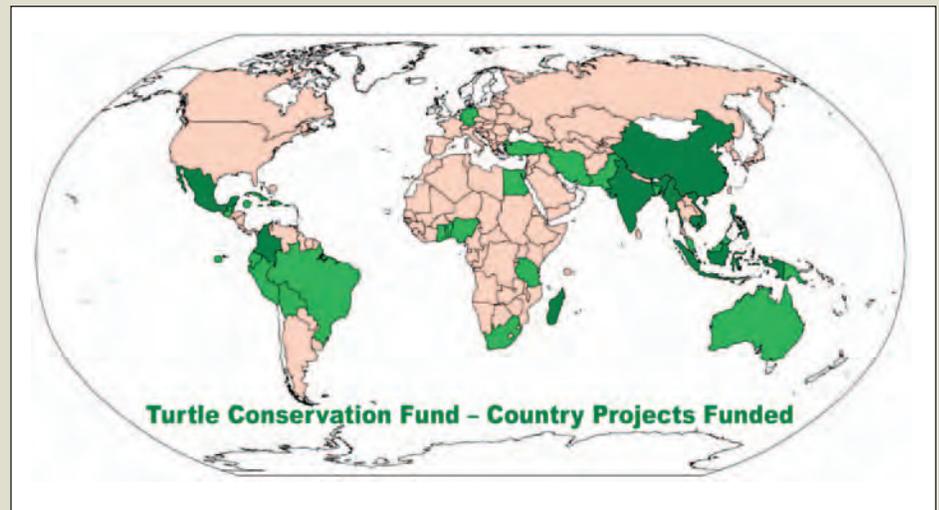
funding for one or two projects. The TCF continues to strive to meet the urgent conservation challenges and opportunities for all of the world's endangered tortoises and freshwater turtles, and is gradually expanding a portfolio of assisted species, countries, and projects.

An example of a country where the TCF has focused its efforts is China. This country is home to nine of the TCFs 42 target species, more than any other nation. These species are represented by seven Asian box turtle species and two giant softshells, all categorized as Critically Endangered. One of the softshells, *Rafetus swinhoei*, is precariously teetering on the brink of extinction, as it is known from only four living individuals. The softshells and box turtles were driven to near extinction because they were relentlessly hunted for food and use in traditional medicine. Collecting animals for the pet trade has also been a factor contributing to the decline of the remaining box turtles. Overall, the TCF has supported projects on the ecology, status, conservation genetics, and other measures needed to conserve China's Critically Endangered turtles. Additionally, work by the TCF's partner organization, the Turtle Survival Alliance, has been funded partially by the TCF, in an attempt to breed the two remaining *Rafetus swinhoei* in captivity, both held at the Suzhou Zoo in China. The future of this species truly hinges on this effort. Should it not succeed, this species may be lost forever. In all, 10 projects have been funded for China's Critically Endangered turtles since 2007, totaling over \$46,000 and involving 17 investigators.

In Madagascar, the TCF began its efforts in 2007 by supporting the IUCN/SSC Tortoise and Freshwater

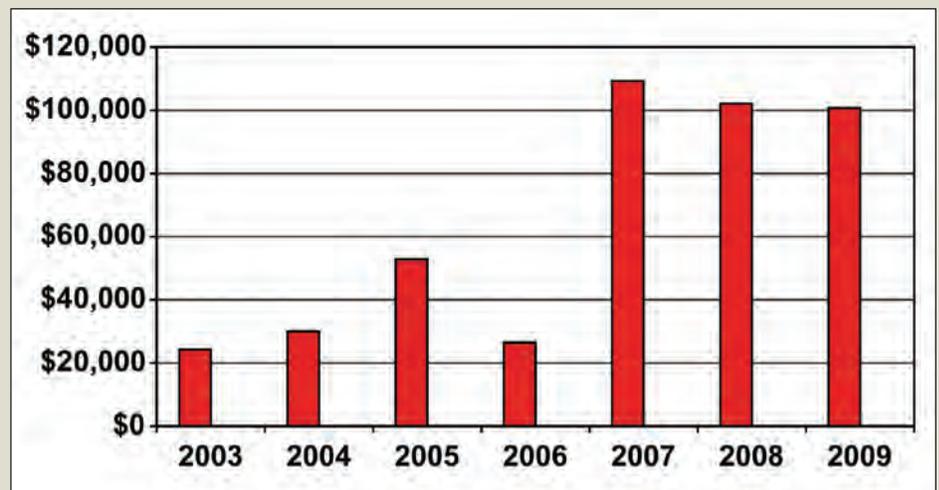
Turtle Specialist Group workshop that examined the current IUCN Red List status of all Madagascan tortoises and freshwater turtles. All five endemic species were uplisted to Critically Endangered, as a result of widespread population declines and habitat destruction. Additional key outcomes of this workshop were conservation prioritization and strategic action planning. Implementing the plan developed at the workshop, and focusing on the endemic species, the TCF has since supported several projects on the ecology, status, critical areas, and measures needed to conserve Madagascan turtles and tortoises, notably the Spider Tortoise (*Pyxis arachnoides*) and the Flat-tailed Tortoise (*P. planicauda*). Additionally, work has been funded to examine the effectiveness of a repatriation release program for the Madagascan Big-headed Turtle (*Erymnochelys madagascariensis*). In all, the TCF has funded nine projects in Madagascar since 2007, totaling over \$41,000 and involving 10 investigators. Not only are these projects working effectively to conserve Critically Endangered turtles in Madagascar, but they are also providing valuable training for Malagasy conservationists.

The above are only a couple of examples of how and where the TCF has been providing strategic assistance and conservation funds for threatened tortoises and freshwater turtles. Such work cannot be done in a vacuum. The TCF is a true partnership coalition of leading turtle conservation organizations and individuals. Partner organizations include Conservation International, International Union for the Conservation of Nature/Species Survival Commission/Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group,



Countries where the TCF has provided funding for turtle conservation projects are shown in green (37 countries); countries in dark green (10) are focus countries with 5–10 projects funded each. Countries in beige contain native turtle populations that have not received funding from the TCF; countries and regions or islands in white contain no native turtle populations.

Total annual grant disbursements by the TCF since its inception (two funding cycles per year).



Turtle Survival Alliance, European Association of Zoos and Aquaria Shellshock Campaign, Chelonian Research Foundation, Chester Zoo, Fort Worth Zoo, Asian Turtle Program, Wildlife Conservation Society, Behler Chelonian Center/Turtle Conservancy, Chelonian Research Institute, and Humane Society International – Australia.

Individuals on the TCF Executive Board span the globe and are

among the world's foremost turtle biologists and conservationists. Included in this leadership group are Gary Ades, Chris B. Banks, Kurt A. Buhlmann, Kevin R. Buley, Antoine Cadi, Bernard Devaux, Eric Goode, Douglas B. Hendrie, Brian D. Horne, Rick Hudson, Gerald Kuchling, Richard Lewis, Susan Lieberman, Luca Luiselli, George A. Meyer, Russell A. Mittermeier, Vivian Páez, Hans-Dieter Philippen, Colin Poole,

Peter C. H. Pritchard, Hugh R. Quinn (Co-Chair), Martina Raffel, Anders G. J. Rhodin (Co-Chair), Walter C. Sedgwick, Peter Paul van Dijk, and Henk Zwartepoorte.

To date, the TCF has received nearly \$850,00 in total funding or committed support over the next few years, primarily from private foundations and individual private donors, in addition to various in-kind donations from several organizations. Among many others, we most gratefully acknowledge the very welcome and substantial support over the years from the following wonderfully generous and committed individuals and organizations: the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) Shellshock Campaign, George A. Meyer and Maria Semple, Conservation International, Frankel Family Foundation, Matthew Frankel, Humane Society International – Australia, A Taste of Thai, Chuck Landrey, Behler Chelonian Center/Turtle Conservancy, The Maritime Hotel, Eric Goode, Walde Research and Environmental Consulting, Island Foundation, Wildlife Conservation Society, Fort Worth Zoo, Chester Zoo, Savannah River Ecology Laboratory, Nando Peretti Foundation, Chelonian Research Foundation, and Panaphil Foundation. We thank them all, as do all the endangered turtles and tortoises of the world.

To learn more about the TCF and its many programs, to apply for grants, or to consider a donation to the TCF, please visit our website at: www.TurtleConservationFund.org

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Top: Collecting eggs laid by the last captive pair of *Rafetus swinhoei* at the Suzhou Zoo, China, as part of a TCF-supported project co-directed by the Turtle Survival Alliance.

Middle: Measuring wild *Erymnochelys madagascariensis* for a TCF-supported repatriation project for the species in Madagascar.

Bottom: The TCF Executive Board (partial) at a funding-cycle review meeting in New York at The Maritime Hotel, March of 2009. **Front to back, left to right; seated:** Colin Poole; **1st row:** Peter Paul van Dijk, Brian Horne, Hugh Quinn, Rick Hudson; **2nd row:** Russ Mittermeier, Walter Sedgwick, Hans-Dieter Philippen; **last row:** Peter Pritchard, Anders Rhodin, Kurt Buhlmann, and Eric Goode (meeting host).