

Shellshocking News

Official Newsletter of the EAZA Shellshock Turtle & Tortoise Campaign 2004/5

Issue 1: January 2005

Shellshock Supports Tsunami Relief Effort in Sri Lanka

Urgent support is being provided by the EAZA Shellshock campaign, Chester Zoo and Colchester Zoo to help rebuild the lives and livelihoods of the Sri Lankan community of Kosgoda, devastated by the recent tsunami.

This small community was completely dependent on turtle conservation activities through the Turtle Conservation Project (TCP), tourism and fishing. Elsewhere, hatcheries have been destroyed and a popular beach resort nearby was severely damaged. Fishermen, along with their houses and their boats, have lost their single source of income, the only way of life they have ever known.

Funds are urgently required to provide food, water and medical supplies to hundreds of displaced community members. It is vital to recommence the Turtle Conservation Project as soon as possible, so that the livelihoods of the whole community can be restored.

Shellshock has provided an initial £2000 (2850 Euros) from its fundraising appeal fund for emergency support to Kosgoda. This has been matched by £2000 from Chester Zoo's Emergency Conservation Fund and a further £2000 from Colchester Zoo's Conservation Fund.

Thushan Kapurusinghe, project leader of the TCP has written about the recent events in Kosgoda:

The Turtle Conservation Project (TCP) is a Sri Lankan charity established in March 1995 which works at three locations in the south and west of Sri Lanka: Rekawa, Kalpitiya and Kosgoda. The TCP aims to facilitate the implementation of sustainable marine turtle conservation strategies through education, research and community participation. Five out of the seven species of turtles, come to nest on Sri Lankan beaches. Since 1993, TCP has implemented many community based conservation activities such as an in-situ marine turtle nest protection, mangrove rehabilitation, community environmental education programmes, school and hotel presentations on conservation, English language teaching programmes provided by our foreign volunteers, establishment of a community library, a medicinal herb garden, the training of local people in administrative skills and general maintenance of local temples and community centres as well as extensive scientific research into the population and survival of marine sea turtles, coral reefs and mangroves. TCP's site at Kosgoda on the southern coast of Sri Lanka was set up in August 2003 and it is here that most devastation from the recent tsunami was sustained.



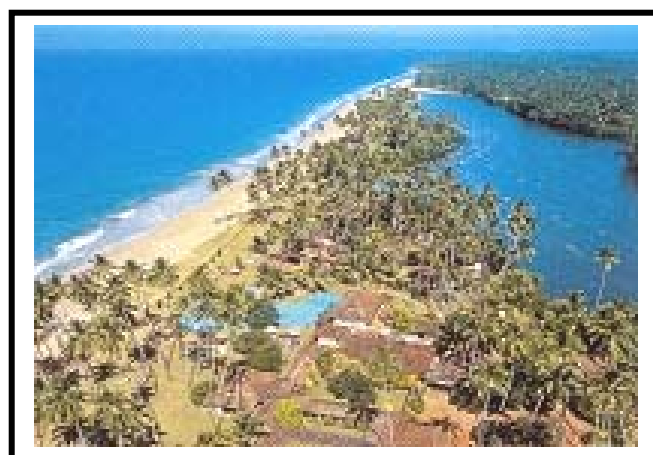
TCP employed 17 local people (all previously turtle egg poachers) as nest protectors, and six research officers. The research station, beach hut with educational materials and small-scale gift shop, were run by these officers with the help of our foreign volunteers.

The Tsunami

On the 26th December, TCP was invited by the Divisional secretary of Panadura to present an exhibition on the conservation of sea turtles. At 8.30am the sea was calm and the beach patrols were operating as usual. The Field manager Mr Chandralal, was on Kosgoda beach collecting educational material for this exhibition. Setting up the exhibition in Panadura an hour later, Mr Chandralal and Project Leader, Mr Thushan Kapurusinghe, received warning of rising sea levels in the Kosgoda area and immediately ordered a complete evacuation of the beach. Unfortunately, some of the nest protectors on duty failed to take the warning seriously and remained on the beach. As the first wave struck water levels rose to waist height and employees began collecting equipment. Within minutes the second fatal wave, 6 m high hit the beach and reached 1.5 km inland. Miraculously, our foreign volunteers, research officers and some nest protectors managed to run away from the onslaught and climb trees to escape. Tragically, three nest protectors lost their lives and all have suffered the loss of family members. The homes of all nest protectors have been destroyed located between 20 and 200 m from the sea, some within just 10 m. The TCP beach hut was washed away. At the TCP field station, 1km inland, water levels rose to 2 m damaging all equipment and personal properties, leaving only the structure of the building intact. All educational materials, research equipment and electrical appliances such as computers and fridge were lost; the field station was completely covered with mud and debris.

In Kosgoda village, the lives and livelihoods of the people have been damaged irreparably. This small community was wholly dependent on the collection of turtle

eggs or their protection through TCP, tourism and fishing. All turtle hatcheries have been destroyed, their turtles washed away and found, still alive, up to 1km away. The famous Kosgoda Beach Resort in Kosgoda has been severely damaged; any hope for the development of tourism in the area has been destroyed. All the fishermen, along with their houses and their boats, have lost their single source of income, the only way of life they have ever known.



Kosgoda before December 26th 2004.

TCP Priorities

TCP are currently under-taking a full assessment of the damage to their employees' and TCP properties. There are family members of the staff who are split up or still missing; they currently shelter at four different refugee camps. It is essential that TCP bring these people together and provide emotional support throughout this period. In the short term, TCP are providing food, water and medical supplies to staff members and families. We aim to recommence the turtle conservation programme on January 10th thus enabling our staff to earn a steady income and regain self-sufficiency as soon as possible. In addition, Project Leader Mr Thushan Kapurusinghe, also a committee member of the Panadura Temple Committee, which currently houses 700 displaced people, has used TCP funds to provide basic requirements.

The long-term ambition is to find land away from the sea to house TCP employees, to ensure all have the resources and materials

to rebuild their houses and to continue to provide all support necessary. In this way, TCP can slowly piece together the Kosgoda coastal community.



Kosgoda turtle nesting beach – November 2004

Further Shellshock Tsunami Relief Efforts will Follow

Sri Lanka and Kosgoda are of course just one country and one village affected by the devastating events of December 26th. In the weeks to come, the Shellshock Campaign Planning Group will be identifying priority regions and projects for help and support and directing some of the results of your fundraising efforts to where it is most needed.

Successful turtle conservation is closely tied to the lives and livelihoods of so many coastal communities. By helping to re-build the communities and the projects on which they depend, we will also be helping to minimise the future effects of this natural disaster on the turtle populations of Southeast Asia.

Yunnan box turtle rediscovered

Turtle biologists in China believe that they have found at least one live specimen of the extinct Yunnan box turtle.

Cuora yunnanensis was described from 6 museum specimens collected prior to 1906. A further live animal was reported in 1946, but no confirmed specimens had been seen since then – until now. It is officially classed as Extinct in the 2004 IUCN Red List.

A single female Yunnan box turtle was purchased late last year from a market in Kunming Province, China. The urgency now is to try and establish where the Yunnan box turtle still occurs and to protect them as soon as possible before the remainder are collected for the market.

The Yunnan box turtle features in the Shellshock information pack as an extinct species and we are delighted that this now may well prove to be incorrect!

Shellshock Goes Global

Since the launch of Shellshock at the 2004 EAZA Conference in Sweden, the campaign and its aims have been presented at a number of venues across the world: at the International Zoo Educators and Southeast Asian Zoo Association conferences in Hong Kong in September; at the WAZA and CBSG conferences in Taipei in November; and at the International Aquarium Congress in Monterey Bay, California in December. Interest in the campaign has been immense, and we have just heard that the Australian Regional Association of Zoological Parks and Aquaria (ARAZPA) will be adopting Shellshock in their region. Similar interest from zoos, aquariums and zoo associations in India, Southeast Asia, UAE, Canada and the USA, suggest that Shellshock will soon be a global campaign for turtle and tortoise conservation. If you haven't got involved yet, then don't worry, its not too late. Contact Corinne Bos at the EAZA Executive Office to register for the campaign (corinne.bos@nvdzoos.nl)

Leatherback Turtle Tour 2005

Aquariums and zoos of the UK and Ireland have united in a unique effort for the Shellshock campaign.

As Shellshock spreads its wings beyond the members of EAZA, over 30 British and Irish aquariums will participate in "Shellshock – The Leatherback Turtle Tour 2005".

The tour is being organised and run by Jodie LeCheminant an Aquarist at London Zoo Aquarium and an active member of the Shellshock Campaign Planning Group.

A specially made giant inflatable Leatherback turtle will journey from aquarium to aquarium – spending a week at each - and will become the focus for special Shellshock fundraising events.

The tour was made possible by the Stuart Bell Memorial Fund – a fund set up in memory of a young aquarist from London Aquarium who was tragically killed in 2003. Stuart Bell's passion and dedication to educating and raising awareness of the plight of turtles and other marine life has been the inspiration for the Leatherback Tour.



The Giant Blow-up Turtle will soon begin its tour around the UK & Ireland.

The tour will start on the 14th February with a week of launch events at London Zoo. It will then make its way along the south coast

of England, through Wales, back to London for World Ocean's day in June and then out to Ireland, over to Scotland and work its way back down through the centre of England, making a stop at the EAZA conference in Bristol where the Shellshock campaign will officially come to an end. The inflatable Leatherback however will continue its journey after the end of Shellshock, continuing through England before finishing at Southend-on-Sea, on the East coast of England, on October 28th.

We will report on the progress of The Leatherback Turtle Tour 2005 in later editions of this newsletter.

Tortoise is Surrogate Mother for Orphaned Hippopotamus

NAIROBI, JANUARY 6: A baby hippopotamus that survived the tsunami waves on the Kenyan coast has formed a strong bond with a giant male century-old tortoise, in an animal facility in the Port city of Mombasa, officials said today.

The hippopotamus, nicknamed Owen and weighing about 300 kilograms, was swept down the Sabaki river into the Indian ocean, then forced back to shore when the tsunami struck the Kenyan coast on December 26, before rangers rescued him.

"It is incredible. A-less-than-a-year-old hippo has adopted a male tortoise, about a century old, and the tortoise seems to be very happy with being a 'mother'," said ecologist Paula Kahumbu, who is in-charge of Lafarge park.

"After it was swept away and lost its mother, the hippo was traumatised. It had to look for a surrogate mother. It landed on the tortoise and established a strong bond. They swim, eat and sleep together... The hippo follows the tortoise exactly the way it follows its mother. If somebody approaches the

tortoise, then it becomes aggressive," she said.

Jersey Zoo's Spiny Success

The Spiny Hill Turtle *Heosemys spinosa* from Southeast Asia is on the Shellshock Amber Alert Priority Species list. The majority of animals in the current EAZA ESB for this species originated from the massive Hong Kong customs seizure in 2001. Despite proving relatively easy to maintain, the Spiny Hill Turtle has been incredibly difficult to breed.

On the 30th September however, following a 145 day incubation period, Jersey Zoo were delighted to announce the first European hatching. Weighing in at 37 grams, it can be clearly seen from the picture just how the species gets its common name. Although adult turtles do have serrations around the edge of the shell, they are nothing in comparison to the cog-wheel teeth of the juveniles. It is thought that this incredible shell shape has evolved as a defence mechanism against predators.



EAZA's first spiny hill turtle hatchling
Photo: Gerardo Garcia, Jersey Zoo

Eric Ruivo, Collection Manager at Lisbon Zoo and ESB coordinator for the spiny hill turtle said, "Jersey's success is really a very important one and one for which all the staff deserve congratulations. We now need to

build on this success in order to show the world that rescue operations like the one that brought so many turtles to Europe can really help the conservation of these species."

Latest Hong Kong Rescue

— by Hans-Dieter Philippen

Amsterdam / Prague: December 23rd:

A new shipment of confiscated Asian freshwater turtles arrived at Amsterdam airport from Hong Kong just before Christmas. Unlike the massive rescue operation in 2001, this time the shipment included only specimens and species that were needed for supplementation of existing breeding colonies or needed to initiate new ones. The species rescued were: the Borneo river turtle (*Orlitia borneoensis*), the Malayan flatback turtle (*Notochelys platynota*), the Black marsh turtle (*Siebenrockiella crassicollis*) and the Asian leaf turtle (*Cyclemys dentata*).



A Borneo River Turtle is inspected at Amsterdam Airport. Photo: Hans-Dieter Philippen

In total 60 specimens were rescued by Henk Zwartepoorte (TSA Europe chairman and Turtle Conservation Officer at Rotterdam Zoo, Netherlands), Wim Fontijne (Rotterdam Zoo, Netherlands) and Hans-Dieter Philippen (TSA Europe Vice-chairman, EAZA ARTAG Special Advisor, Germany).

Following customs clearance the turtle shipment was transferred to Hans-Dieter Philippen's holding facilities in Germany for overnight recuperation. The following day, Elmar Meier from Münster zoo collected 6 specimens of flatback turtle. These will be housed at the ICCT (International Center of Conservation of Turtles) at Münster.

On December 27th the 54 remaining specimens were transferred by road to Prague zoo by Hans-Dieter. There the Curator of Lower Vertebrates & Invertebrates, Petr Velensky took possession of the new animals.

On December 28th the national media had the opportunity to visit the turtles. The story of the rescue and re-homing was broadcast on 4 different Czech national TV stations, several radio stations and featured in many newspapers. The media stories focused on the rescue, Prague zoo's new Indonesian jungle house and its role as a Turtle Ark as part of the EAZA Shellshock Campaign.



Curator Petr Velensky is interviewed by the national press. Photo: Hans-Dieter Philippen

After being assessed and medically stabilised at Prague Zoo, some of the turtles were moved to their final Turtle Ark destinations at Tiergarten Wels (Austria), Brno zoo (Czech Republic) and Riga zoo (Latvia).

Turtle Conservation at Zoo Praha – by Hans-Dieter Philippen

Prague, 21st Nov. 2004: The Czech Prime Minister Vaszlav Klaus, the mayor of Prague city, the Indonesian ambassador and the Czech ambassador for Indonesia officially opened Prague Zoo's Indonesian jungle exhibit. As part of the opening ceremony a pair of Komodo dragons was given to the Czech Republic from the Indonesian government.



The new Indonesian Jungle House at Prague Zoo. Photo: Prague Zoo

The new Indonesian exhibit was primarily designed and constructed for mammals (such as Orang-utans and Macaques) and free-ranging bird species, but it has also now developed into a vitally important Turtle Ark facility in Europe and is the centrepiece of Prague Zoo's turtle conservation efforts.

Large multi-species aquaria hold a variety of turtle species including the Indonesian snake-necked turtle (*Chelodina siebenrocki*), the Black marsh turtle (*Siebenrockiella crassicollis*), the Pig-nosed turtle (*Carettochelys insculpta*), juvenile specimens of Critically Endangered Batagur turtles (*Batagur baska*), Indonesian leaf turtles (*Cyclemys dentata*, *C. pulchriata*) and Indonesian box turtles (*Cuora amboinensis*).

The large moat in front of the Orang-utan exhibit is home for several large adult Borneo river turtles (*Orlitia borneensis*), an adult pair of Critically Endangered 'Red Alert' Callagur turtles (*Callagur borneoensis*), one Giant pond turtle (*Heosemys grandis*) and several pairs of Indonesian box turtles (*Cuora amboinensis*).

Congratulations must go to all the staff at Prague Zoo for making this hugely significant contribution towards the development of the Turtle Ark in our EAZA community

Latest campaign sign-up figures

So far a total of 62 EAZA members have signed-up for the Shellshock campaign. We know that many more of you are planning to participate, so please send in your official registration forms as soon as possible.

Edinburgh Zoo Goes Platinum

The first EAZA member to achieve the Shellshock Platinum Award is Edinburgh Zoo in Scotland. In December, Edinburgh pledged £15,000 (21,300 Euros) from their Conservation Fund towards the Shellshock Fundraising Campaign.

Apologies to the BCG

The British Chelonia Group (BCG) would like us to point out that an incorrect website address has been given for their organisation in the Shellshock information pack.

The correct address is:

www.britishcheloniagroup.org.uk/

Shellshocking News Issue 2

The next issue of Shellshocking News will be in the spring. We will need your ideas, suggestions, articles and photographs to make it a reality. Tell us what you are doing at your zoo or aquarium towards the Shellshock campaign effort. Articles and other newsletter material should be sent to k.buley@chesterzoo.org

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**Shellshock is the 2004/5 Conservation Campaign of
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