

# Asian Freshwater Turtles

**Malayan Snail-eating Turtle**  
*Malayemys spp.*

**Malayan Flat-shelled Turtle**  
*Notochelys spp.*

**Southeast Asian Softshell Turtle**  
*Amyda spp.*

**Pig-nosed Turtle**  
*Carettochelys spp.*

**Roti Snake-necked Turtle**  
*Chelodina mccordi*

## GENERAL BACKGROUND

Many species of Asian turtle species are in serious decline. Every year, millions of freshwater turtles are consumed in food markets throughout Asia. A variety of Asian turtles are exported for western pet markets as well. Most specimens in trade are taken from the wild. Although all marine turtles, and all tortoises and box turtles, are listed in the CITES Appendices, many of the Asian freshwater turtles remain unlisted. Control of international trade in these species is overdue.

At CoP11 the conservation problems posed by international trade in Asian freshwater turtles were highlighted for the first time. As a result, CITES Parties adopted Resolution Conf. 11.9, urging all Parties to undertake measures to address this trade. The Parties also listed one genus of Asian freshwater turtle, *Cuora* spp., in Appendix II. In 2002, a technical CITES workshop on Conservation of and Trade in Freshwater Turtles and Tortoises in Asia (hereinafter "Technical Workshop") recommended that all remaining non-listed Asian turtle species be included in the CITES Appendices. At CoP12, discussion about CITES conservation measures for Asian freshwater turtles continued and 33 species of Asian freshwater turtles were listed in Appendix II, including *Heosemys* spp., *Kachuga* spp., *Pelochelys* spp. and *Chitra* spp. At its 19<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Animals Committee adopted a report by the Working Group on Conservation of and Trade in Freshwater Turtles and Tortoises that encouraged range States to develop proposals to list all remaining unlisted Asian chelonian species in Appendix II by CoP13. At CoP13, eight proposals concerning Asian freshwater turtles are to be discussed.

SSN urges CITES Parties to continue to consider conservation measures for Asian freshwater turtles and to support the listing of *Chelodina mccordi* and the genera *Amyda* spp., *Carettochelys* spp., *Malayemys* spp. and *Notochelys* spp. in CITES Appendix II. As the systematics of many Asian turtles are currently under review, a listing at the genus level would be more comprehensive and precautionary than listings of individual species.

**CoP13 Props. 16 and 17** (USA and Indonesia, respectively) Inclusion in Appendix II of the Malayan snail-eating turtle (*Malayemys* spp. (USA) and *Malayemys subtrijuga* (Indonesia))

### SSN VIEW: SUPPORT ADOPTION OF PROPOSALS (preferably listing the whole genus per Prop. 16)

- Exploitation, mainly for international trade, caused populations to be depleted throughout the species' range.
- CITES Appendix II listing was recommended by the 2002 CITES Technical Workshop and in 2003 by a working group of the Animals Committee.
- A listing of the genus *Malayemys* spp. would address future systematic changes, as the status of many species and subspecies of Asian freshwater turtles is currently under review.

The genus and species meet the criteria for listing in Appendix II: wild populations are threatened and already have been decimated by international trade. This species has been recently classified in the IUCN Red List as Vulnerable due to a substantial decline in populations in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam. Populations in Indonesia and Malaysia are small and restricted in their area of distribution. In the 1990s, exports of turtles from Cambodia to Far East Asian food markets totaled several tons per month. *Malayemys* turtles are among the species that have been imported into China in large numbers, with at least 11,300 specimens imported with official permits in 2000.

**CoP13 Props. 18 and 19** (USA and Indonesia, respectively) Inclusion in Appendix II of the Malayan flat-shelled turtle (*Notochelys* spp. (USA) and *Notochelys platynota* (Indonesia))

### SSN VIEW: SUPPORT ADOPTION OF PROPOSALS (preferably listing the whole genus per Prop. 18)

- Collection of specimens for local and international trade has significantly depleted populations.
- While this species was not sold in Chinese food markets in the 1980s, in recent years it has been regularly offered for sale and future demand is expected to continue.
- CITES Appendix II listing was recommended by the 2002 CITES Technical Workshop and in 2003 by a working group of the Animals Committee.
- A listing of the genus *Notochelys* spp. would address future systematic changes, as the status of many species and subspecies of Asian freshwater turtles is currently under review.

The Malayan flat-shelled turtle recently has been reclassified in the IUCN Red List from Data Deficient (1996) to Vulnerable (2000). Whereas in the past this species was very common in Indonesia and Malaysia, a serious decline has been observed in recent years. Wild populations have been severely fragmented. Collection pressures have intensified, and extended into areas previously not impacted by collection. It has been reported that in East Asian food markets, two to three tons of *Notochelys platynota* may be sold every day. In 1999 alone, Malaysia exported at least 12,300 specimens. This species meets the criteria for CITES Appendix II listing.

**CoP13 Prop. 20 (USA) Inclusion in Appendix II of Southeast Asian softshell turtle (*Amyda* spp.)**

#### **SSN VIEW: SUPPORT ADOPTION OF PROPOSAL**

- *Amyda cartilaginea* is the most heavily traded, wild-harvested Asian turtle.
- CITES Appendix II listing was recommended by the 2002 CITES Technical Workshop and in 2003 by a working group of the Animals Committee.
- The abundance of this species in trade has decreased by two-thirds in the past 15 years, reflecting dwindling wild populations in Indonesia; in many other range States, local populations have been reduced.

This species clearly meets the criteria for listing in CITES Appendix II. It is heavily traded on an international level. In Indonesia, intensive harvests of several hundred thousand specimens per year represents the largest wild-harvest of any turtle species. Until recently, Cambodia exported several tons of specimens of this species per month to Vietnam. In China this species is the most abundant turtle in food markets, comprising over 15 percent of the total weight of all imported turtles. Both immature and mature specimens are caught. Due to late sexual maturity, these large-scale off-takes severely affect populations and already have caused a significant decline in most range States. This species is classified as Vulnerable in the IUCN Red List. International trade is the main threat to this species, and it is expected to continue at unsustainable levels until the species is placed under CITES control.

**CoP13 Props. 21 and 22 (USA and Indonesia, respectively) Inclusion in Appendix II of the pig-nosed turtle (*Carettochelys* spp. (USA) and *Carettochelys insculpta* (Indonesia))**

#### **SSN VIEW: SUPPORT ADOPTION OF PROPOSALS (preferably listing the whole genus per Prop. 21)**

- Recently intensified collection of eggs is partially aimed at supplying hatchlings for the international pet trade.
- CITES listing will improve enforcement control in the three range States.
- CITES Appendix II listing was recommended by the 2002 CITES Technical Workshop and in 2003 by a working group of the Animals Committee.
- A listing of the genus *Carettochelys* spp. would address future systematic changes, as the status of many species and subspecies of Asian freshwater turtles is currently under review.

This species, the only living member of its family, is exported from Indonesia in large numbers for the international live animal trade. Whereas adults and eggs are mainly sold for human consumption, some eggs are incubated and hatchlings are exported to international pet markets. Collection of eggs has been recently estimated to reach 1.5-2 million annually. Populations in Papua New Guinea are heavily exploited for local consumption, and populations in Australia suffer from habitat loss.

*Carettochelys insculpta* meets the criteria for listing in CITES Appendix II: it is heavily traded internationally and in recent decades, the harvest pressure has increased to levels widely perceived to endanger the species over much of its range.

**CoP13 Prop. 23 (Indonesia and USA) Inclusion in Appendix II of the Roti snake-necked turtle (*Chelodina mcordi*)**

#### **SSN VIEW: SUPPORT ADOPTION OF PROPOSAL**

- Immediate measures to control international trade are needed to prevent extinction of this species.
- The species meets the criteria for inclusion in Appendix I.
- CITES Appendix II listing was recommended by the 2002 CITES Technical Workshop and in 2003 by a working group of the Animals Committee.

This species is endemic to a single small Indonesian island, Roti, and was only described in 1994. Within the past ten years, the Roti snake-necked turtle has been faced such heavy harvest pressures that it is now facing extinction and is classified by IUCN as Critically Endangered. This species is exclusively collected for international pet markets. Due to its rarity, by the late 1990s the retail price had risen to US\$ 2,000 per specimen. Indonesian traders are not able to acquire further specimens due to serious depletion of wild populations, although demand for the international pet trade is remains high. Only two or three small separate wild populations are known and these are limited to an area of only 70 km<sup>2</sup>, making them especially prone to over-exploitation. The only range State, Indonesia, is proposing the Appendix II listing of this highly endangered species. CITES Parties are strongly urged to support this much-needed proposal.