

NEWSBRIEFS

Amphibian Reserve Launched in Colombia

An exciting new partnership between the IUCN/SSC Amphibian Specialist Group, IUCN Netherlands, Dendrobatidae Nederland, Conservation International-Colombia, and Fundación ProAves has led to the launch of a new amphibian reserve to protect spectacular poison frogs in Colombia. Colombia has more threatened amphibians than any other country, largely restricted to highly fragmented subtropical and montane forests which are unprotected and at threat of agricultural expansion. Within Colombia, the hotspot for threatened amphibians is the Central Cordillera, which also has the greatest concentration of coffee production in South America and is almost denuded of natural forests.



MAURICIO RIVERA

A new amphibian reserve in Colombia is home to many threatened species, including the previously undescribed Little Golden Poison Frog (*Ranitomeya tolimensis*).

After extensive searches of the Central Cordillera for amphibians, herpetologist and Fundación ProAves President, Alonso Quevedo, with ecologist Oscar Gallego, discovered one of the largest surviving forest fragments, a mere 200 acres of forest on its eastern flank. Not only did Alonso discover that the 200 acres contained many threatened amphibians, but that it held many previously undescribed species including two spectacular poison frogs, recently named as the Swainson's Poison Frog (*Ranitomeya doriswainsonae*) and Little Golden Poison Frog (*Ranitomeya tolimensis*).

Sadly, these last 200 acres were in the process of being cleared for avocado and coffee plantations and that would almost certainly seal the fate of countless amphibians and other unique biodiversity. "In an urgent bid to save this unique island of amphibian diversity," said Alonso Quevedo, "I negotiated with different land owners of the 200-acre forest to stop clearing forest and sell the land to the national conservation NGO, Fundación ProAves. The owners agreed, so I immediately approached the IUCN/SSC Amphibian Specialist Group and IUCN Netherlands for emergency support."

The two groups promptly provided the support necessary to purchase the land and

resources for the long-term protection and management of the area. In early December, the newly named "Ranita Dorada Amphibian Reserve," named after the Little Golden Poison Frog, was launched. This action comes at a crucial moment when conservation measures are urgently needed for this highly sensitive group.

Robin Moore
Amphibian Specialist Group
Species, Magazine of the Species Survival Commission
(IUCN) 50:15

Tracking the Illegal Capture of Marine Turtles

Critically Endangered marine turtles from southeastern Asia are being targeted by foreign vessels originating in Hainan, China, and (to a lesser degree) Vietnam. These boats leave port with the express purpose of catching marine turtles, a practice which is illegal both in their home countries and in the waters of countries in which they fish. The last half decade has seen such a noteworthy increase that there is a need to determine the severity of this practice. How much poaching goes unrecorded or undetected? How severe are the impacts to turtle populations? What drives this trade, and how can it be curtailed?

Significant and urgent inroads need to be made into curbing this illegal trade and further research is needed to fully understand the market forces at play in illegal wildlife trade in order to design economic deterrents to it. In June 2009 members of the IUCN Marine Turtle Specialist Group coorganized a workshop along with the Terengganu State Government, University Malaysia Terengganu, the Marine Research Foundation, Conservation International (Philippines), and the IUCN Marine Turtle Specialist Group. The purpose of

the workshop was to document the apprehensions of foreign vessels and fishermen involved in the illegal direct capture, to present information on the declining trend of marine turtles in the region and the efforts undertaken to arrest the decline, and to demonstrate that direct capture of adult and sub-adult marine turtles will rapidly cause a collapse of turtle populations in the Southeast Asian Region.

Solutions to the direct capture of sea turtles were discussed, and there are plans to address the problem through a partnership with Chinese authorities and scientists, analyzing market forces, raising awareness within the fishery, training of customs staff in turtle meat and parts identification, tracking consignments through DNA evaluation, translation and provision of conservation materials into Mandarin, and continued dialogue and information exchange sessions.

Nicolas J. Pilcher, Chan Eng Heng, and Kevin Hiew
Marine Turtle Specialist Group

The State of the World's Sea Turtles (SWOT) report is produced by the Marine Turtle Specialist Group in partnership with Conservation International and Duke University. The fourth volume, released in 2009, features the first-ever map of global Flatback Turtle (*Natator depressus*) nesting data, genetic stocks, and inwater distribution. Other highlights include articles about why Leatherback Turtle populations vary globally, how retail sales help communities and sea turtles in Brazil, and how fishermen are aiding conservation efforts in Canada. The full report can be downloaded at www.seaturtlestatus.org.

Roderic Mast and Nicolas J. Pilcher
Co-Chairs, Marine Turtle Specialist Group
Species, Magazine of the Species Survival Commission
(IUCN) 50:24–25



NICOLE MOULETT, SEATURTLE.ORG

Critically Endangered marine turtles, such as this Australian Flatback Turtle (*Natator depressus*), are being targeted by foreign vessels originating in Hainan, China, and Vietnam.

Dog Hunts Invasive Turtles

If the turtles in Blackburn Lake don't smell right, Angus will sniff them out. The pure-bred Labrador Retriever has been trained specifically to track and hunt down the illegally introduced Red-eared Slider (*Trachemys scripta elegans*). The invasive pest has been seen in Blackburn Lake Sanctuary, Elsternwick Park Lake, and Ruffey Lake Park in Whitehorse, Australia.

A turtle was captured in Blackburn Lake in January of this year, but authorities believe up to three turtles and possibly a nest remain. Gary Jackson, Angus' trainer, said the five-year-old was the only dog in the world trained specifically to catch Red-eared Sliders. "We have trained him to ignore native turtles and eggs," Mr. Jackson said. "He loves finding the slider turtle's nests; when he sniffs one he starts digging for it and unless we pull him off, he would dig all the way through to the nest and probably eat the eggs."

Angus is on loan from the Queensland Government for the next week and will be hunting for the elusive turtle in Blackburn.

Agriculture Minister Joe Helper said the World Conservation Union listed the Red-eared Slider as one of the world's 100 most-invasive species. Females lay up to 70 eggs and, if unchecked, the species can destroy native habitats and food supply. Red-eared Sliders have a distinctive red stripe behind each eye and a dome-shaped shell. Mr. Helper urged the public to report any sightings to the Department of Primary Industries.

James Dowling
Whitehorse (Australia) Leader
27 October 2009



BRENT MELTON

A Labrador Retriever has been trained to track illegally introduced Red-eared Sliders (*Trachemys scripta elegans*) in Whitehorse, Australia.

African Dwarf Frogs Implicated in *Salmonella* Outbreak

Amphibians and reptiles are carriers of *Salmonella*. This type of bacteria is a health hazard most frequently contracted by touching raw foods (e.g., meats, eggs), but also can be acquired by touching animals that carry *Salmonella*. Thoroughly washing hands after any potential contact is important if infections are to be avoided. African Dwarf Frogs (*Hymenochirus boettgeri*) have been implicated in 85 cases of patients with *Salmonella*



KARLIK SZPONIASTY

African Dwarf Frogs (*Hymenochirus boettgeri*) have been implicated in a multistate outbreak of *Salmonella* infections.

typhimurium infections in 2009. This was the first reported multistate outbreak of *Salmonella* infections associated with amphibians. The investigation conducted by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention found the infection in 31 states, extending from Massachusetts to California, and the age range of patients was 3 weeks to 54 years. The multistate investigation revealed that all patients were exposed to frogs, which were traced back to the same breeder in California. African Dwarf Frogs are aquatic animals sold as ornamental aquarium pets. The most likely source of transmission in this outbreak was contact with water from the frogs' aquaria.

National Center for Zoonotic, Vector-borne, and
Enteric Diseases (ZVED)
7 January 2010

Florida Wildlife (Native and Non-native) Affected by Protracted Cold Spell

As January daytime temperatures hovered in the 50s and dropped below 30 at night for several days in a row, Florida's crops, as well as native and non-native flora and fauna felt the chill. Wildlife officials reported at least 70 dead crocodiles, more than 60 manatee carcasses, and perhaps the biggest fish kill in modern Florida history. Florida sea-turtle rehabilitators organized a massive rescue of more than 2,000 turtles suffering cold-stun syndrome. The cold water paralyzes them, making them unable to swim or feed.

"What we witnessed was a major ecological disturbance event equal to a fire or a hurricane," said Frank Mazzotti, a wildlife ecologist and associate professor at the University of Florida. "A lot of things have happened that nobody has seen before in Florida."

The cold temperatures also affected many of the marquee names in the state's invasive species zoo. "Anecdotally, we might have lost maybe half of the pythons out there to the cold," said Scott Hardin, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's exotic species coordinator. "Iguanas definitely. From a collection of observations from people, more than 50 percent fatality on Green Iguanas."

Catatonic iguanas were reported falling from trees and littering walkways and canals in a state of suspended animation.

The cold snap played into a highly politicized debate over how to prevent non-native species from colonizing the United States. Reptile dealers and hobbyists strongly oppose a proposal by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to ban the import of and interstate trade in Burmese Pythons and several other large snakes. They say southern Florida's cold snap shows that these species don't threaten to spread north, as some claim, and a federal crackdown is unnecessary.

"Pythons are tropical animals," said Andrew Wyatt, president of the United States Association of Reptile Keepers. "When temperatures fall below a certain level, they are unable to survive. It reinforces the idea that the pythons can't exist more than a short period of time north of Lake Okeechobee. Even the pythons in the Everglades are dying during the cold snap." Wyatt said that scientists are downplaying the effect of cold weather on the pythons because that would undermine their ability to win grants to study a problem that has received international publicity.

No one knows how many Burmese Pythons live in the Everglades, where they were released as unwanted pets or where they found refuge after hurricanes destroyed their breeding facilities — but what's certain is that a lot fewer are there today than a month ago.

Greg Graziani, a police officer who owns a reptile breeding facility, is one of several licensed python hunters who stalks the snakes in the Everglades. In cold weather, Graziani said, pythons go into a catatonic state, and if they don't make it to a safe place to ride out the weather, freeze to death. "We're finding the smaller pythons are handling it better than the large ones — the smaller ones can get into different cracks and crevices to maintain the temperatures they need."

Adapted from articles in the
Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel, The Miami Herald,
and The Orlando Sentinel



CAROLE SAUCIER

Green Iguanas (*Iguana iguana*) were literally falling from the trees in southern Florida. Unable to revive after the sustained cold temperatures, they made their contribution to the workload of the state's "clean-up" crew of vultures and other scavengers.