

WCC-2012-Rec-140-EN

Reversing the crisis of the decline in turtle survival

REALIZING that turtles have existed for over 200 million years, since the age of dinosaurs;

NOTING that turtles (comprising tortoises, freshwater turtles and marine turtles) are long-term indicators of the quality of the environments they inhabit and that in many parts of the world they have considerable ecosystem functionality as well as major economic and cultural importance for many people;

FURTHER NOTING that the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) has been concerned with the rapid declines of turtle populations worldwide for many decades;

ACKNOWLEDGING the ongoing efforts of assessing threat levels for turtles for the *IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* by scientists from the IUCN SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group (TFTSG), the IUCN SSC Marine Turtle Specialist Group (MTSG), Conservation International, Wildlife Conservation Society, and several other turtle conservation organizations, with input from turtle specialists from more than 50 countries;

AWARE of the alarming ongoing findings of this work, in which, of the 228 known turtle species assessed on the *IUCN Red List* to date (out of 330 species overall), 134 species (59%) are classified as globally threatened (i.e. in the IUCN threat categories of Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable), with 76 (33%) of these being Critically Endangered or Endangered;

NOTING that draft *IUCN Red List* assessments are in progress by the TFTSG for the remaining 102 turtle species, indicating that another 15 species are likely to qualify on the *Red List* as threatened, amounting to a total of 149 out of 330 species worldwide, or 45% of all species; and several more species are assessed as Data Deficient, and if these are threatened at the same rate as other turtles, then 52% of all turtles are globally threatened with possible extinction;

NOTING that the proportion of threatened turtles is thus among the highest proportions of threatened species of all vertebrate groups assessed;

ALARMED that for nearly 70% of turtle species assessed as threatened, exploitation and trade in massive volumes that measured in thousands of tons annually of live or processed turtles for food consumption, medicinal products, and, to a lesser extent, for pets, are the leading or major contributing threats (27 of 32 = 84% of Critically Endangered species; 28 of 44 = 64% of Endangered species; and 37 of 58 = 64% of Vulnerable species), with much of this threat generated by a growing globalization and commercialization of what originated in the 1990s as the Asian Turtle Trade;

AWARE that of the 10 species and subspecies of tortoises and freshwater turtles that have gone extinct in historical times (2% of all 455 turtle and tortoise species and subspecies), seven were extirpated by targeted exploitation for human consumption, and two due to loss of freshwater habitats;

CELEBRATING that the 2010 goal posited by the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, 2002) – to achieve a significant reduction in the rate of loss of biological diversity – was reached with respect to turtles; but

CONCERNED that meeting Aichi Target 12 of the *Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020* – halting extinctions by 2020 – is by no means certain for turtles, considering that the Pinta Island Giant Galapagos Tortoise (*Chelonoidis abingdonii*) was until June 2012 represented

by a single known surviving individual, and the Red River Giant Softshell Turtle (*Rafetus swinhoei*) by only four non-reproducing individuals fragmented between three locations in two countries, and that several species on the Top 25 list of *Turtles in Trouble: The World's 25+ Most Endangered Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles*, as documented in 2011 by the Turtle Conservation Coalition, are represented by global populations of less than a few hundred individuals;

RECOGNIZING the efforts of IUCN to work in partnership with various international bodies to protect habitats and species, and that such partnerships exist with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), the Ramsar Convention, the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA), and many governmental, non-governmental and donor organizations;

APPLAUDING the extensive activities focused on conservation of turtles undertaken by government departments, universities, international, national and local conservation organizations, zoos, aquaria, IUCN Specialist Groups, and other institutions, to safeguard the continuing survival of turtles in their native ranges and natural habitats at ecologically relevant, and if necessary restored, population sizes, to reduce habitat loss and support habitat recovery, to reduce the incidence of unsustainable exploitation and trade, to assist in finding suitable destinations for confiscated animals, to establish captive breeding assurance colonies as a last line of defence against extinction, and to study and publicize the conservation biology and survival status of turtles; and

HIGHLIGHTING the recovery of the Aldabra Giant Tortoise (*Aldabrachelys gigantea* or *Dipsochelys dussumieri*) and several forms of Galapagos Tortoises (*Chelonoidis nigra* group), the increasing population of Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle (*Lepidochelys kempii*), and the rediscovery of the Yunnan Box Turtle (*Cuora yunnanensis*), as examples of historic and ongoing actions that have turned the tide for turtle species that appeared to be headed for inevitable extinction;

The World Conservation Congress, at its session in Jeju, Republic of Korea, 6–15 September 2012;

1. REQUESTS the Director General to:
 - a. use the existing partnerships with international bodies to help strengthen tortoise, freshwater turtle, and marine turtle conservation efforts, encompassing assessment, research, and both *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation measures;
 - b. ensure that the Programme Area *Valuing and conserving nature* of the *IUCN Programme 2013–2016* includes actions with regard to turtles, within existing policies and governance systems with a goal of strengthening:
 - i. research and status assessments;
 - ii. protected area management systems and ecological corridors, taking into account the particular needs and threats to turtles in freshwater (notably riverine), terrestrial and marine habitats; and
 - iii. dedicated support for the Global Reptile Assessment efforts with special attention and resources for turtles; and
 - c. support and cooperate with the continuing efforts of the SSC TFTSG and MTSG to:
 - i. address this unparalleled threat of the turtle survival crisis; and

- ii. support the updating of Turtle Conservation Action Plans by TFTSG and MTSG, and support collaborative efforts to implement such Action Plans; and
 - d. ensure that tortoises, freshwater turtles and marine turtles are eligible for support from the SOS – Save Our Species initiative and other such endeavours;
2. CALLS ON government agencies and the NGO conservation community to focus on maintaining and expanding as necessary their systems of protected areas, with particular emphasis on Key Biodiversity Areas and Zero Extinction sites, to ensure that representative populations of all native turtle species are adequately protected from targeted exploitation, habitat loss and degradation, and the impacts of invasive species;
3. RECOMMENDS that all Parties to the CITES Convention:
 - a. evaluate that turtle species subject to international trade are appropriately included in the CITES Appendices;
 - b. ensure that international trade adheres to CITES regulations, including detailed Non-Detriment Findings being made, and including complete reporting of trade in parts (e.g. shell) and derivative products (e.g. jelly) of turtles;
 - c. ensure that domestic laws and regulations adequately address both the requirements of CITES and safeguard native turtle populations from over-exploitation, that all pertinent laws and regulations are diligently enforced, and that appropriate awareness and capacity are developed within the government agencies concerned with turtle offtake and trade; and
 - d. collaborate with competent NGOs to effectively and humanely triage confiscated live turtle specimens, including:
 - i. dedicating appropriate resources for rescue facilities and veterinary and other skills to maintain animals after confiscation; and
 - ii. implementing guidelines and protocols to humanely place such animals, either through monitored repatriation, reintroduction, or accession into long-term captive conservation breeding facilities;
4. CALLS ON the World Customs Organization and its constituent country members to develop Harmonized Customs Codes for turtles and turtle parts and derivatives; and
5. URGES the TRAFFIC Network to continue treating the monitoring of both legal and illegal trade in turtles and turtle derivative parts as one of its highest priorities; and urges IUCN Members to assist and enable TRAFFIC in this priority focus by providing information, funding and other support.