



## PRESS RELEASE    Turtle & Tortoises in Crisis – The Quiet Extinction

Turtles and tortoises have been on our planet for almost **250 million years**. This means that they have witnessed the rise and fall of dinosaurs, they watched the first birds fly, and they have observed our own rapid evolution from the most harmless of primates. Now, in the space of less than *thirty* years they are being wiped from the face of the planet.

Man has exploited turtles and tortoises for centuries – for their supposed medicinal value, and as a source of protein. However, the liberalisation of foreign trade in China has escalated the trade and eating of turtles and tortoises to an unsustainable, fatal degree.

The problem is however not confined to the mass trade in China and the South-East Asian region. Throughout the world, turtle and tortoise habitats are being degraded, fragmented, destroyed, and developed. Where populations remain they often fall victim to unnatural predation, egg collection and pollution, and from their demand as ‘bushmeat’. Many of the 265+ species also face pressures from the international pet trade and are collected from the wild in unsustainable numbers.

It is humans that are driving many species to the point of extinction. It is humans that must now act now to save them.

The European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) launched the **Shellshock Turtle & Tortoise Campaign 2004/5** on 22 September 2004. The 290 member zoos and aquaria of this European regional association have come together to fight this vital conservation cause - to try and save these ancient and gentle species from extinction.

### The Shellshock Missions

The EAZA Shellshock Campaign has three missions:

**Mission Target 1** is to raise awareness of the diabolical conservation and welfare crisis that the world's turtles and tortoises currently face. EAZA zoos and aquaria will highlight the problems and try and generate support to help save them. With an annual attendance of 125 million people and education being one of the key activities of zoos and aquaria, EAZA members are very capable to spread this message.

Shellshock has enlisted the assistance of **Oscar the Turtle** to help promote the crisis. Oscar is one of the stars of Creature Comforts® [www.creaturecomforts.tv](http://www.creaturecomforts.tv) a fantastic series of clay-animation films from the triple Oscar winning Aardman Animations. Oscar will appear on a range of exclusive Shellshock merchandise available through your local participating EAZA zoo or aquarium.

**Mission Target 2** of Shellshock is to encourage zoos and aquaria to work with more specimens and species of turtle and tortoise – to bring them into the safety of the Turtle Ark.

With the current scale of the global turtle conservation crisis, many species of turtle and tortoise are doomed to extinction in the wild within the next few years. In the short term therefore, the **only** hope of survival for many species is in ‘**Turtle Arks**’ – special captive populations that have set-up in zoos, aquaria and private collections around the world, to prevent their total extinction.

These Turtle Arks preserve these species and thereby retaining the option for future conservation action (i.e. their reintroduction) when circumstances have changed sufficiently in the wild to permit this.

**Mission Target 3** of Shellshock is to raise funds that will directly support the conservation of turtle and tortoise species in their countries of origin. Turtle and tortoise conservation is not expensive. A project that can literally save a species from extinction can be completed for €5,000 to €10,000 – less than the price of a second-hand car!

The money that the EAZA Shellshock Campaign raises during 2005 will go to support conservation of turtles in the wild where they can still be saved. Contact your local participating zoo or aquarium to find out what you can do to help.

Kevin Buley, Curator of Reptiles at Chester Zoo and the EAZA Shellshock Campaign organiser said:

*“Tortoises can live to be well over 100 years, and were here on earth even before the dinosaurs arrived. Yet within the last few years we have killed literally tens of millions of animals and driven many species to the point of extinction. Without urgent action now, we will lose many species for ever. Shellshock will fight to save as many species as possible, but we need help to fight this urgent conservation cause”.*

Intrepid film-maker Nigel Marven has presented numerous wildlife films over the last 5 years for the Discovery Channel and the BBC. His work has included two series of the incredible 'Walking with Dinosaurs', 'Shark Week', 'Anaconda', 'Pirahana', 'Alligator' and the six-part series 'Giants'. Nigel has this to say about the Shellshock campaign:

*"In my television series Walking with Dinosaurs, I've travelled back in time through the magic of Computer Generated Imagery to meet dinosaurs and other extinct reptiles. It's a frightening possibility that computer generation could soon be the only way to meet some of the species of tortoises and turtles alive today. It's not too late to stop them becoming extinct but we must do something now and that's where Shellshock comes in. Please do all you can to help."*

### **Fast Turtle Trade Facts:**

- Estimates suggest that over **12 million turtles are being sold in China each year**. Many of these animals will be wild caught, and given the low reproductive and growth rate of many species, their extinction in the wild is inevitable.
- During an investigation in 1998, up to **29 tonnes of wildlife per day** were being exported from Vietnam to China. More than 60% of this volume was turtles. This represents up to **17.4 tonnes of turtles per day**. If one turtle weighs, on average, 1kg, this is equivalent to a trade of up to 17,400 turtles *per day* from Vietnam alone.
- Turtles are shipped to food markets in crates or bags where they are piled layers deep. Many animals are transported with one or more hooks stuck in their mouth and/or throat as a result of a baited line capture technique.
- In order to increase their weight, and therefore value, at the market, traded turtles can be force-fed substances such as sand or have their bodies injected with water.

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For more details on Shellshock please contact Kevin Buley, Shellshock Campaign Organiser.

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Additional information is also available on the website of the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria ([www.eaza.net](http://www.eaza.net)). For information on EAZA or Shellshock you may also contact Corinne Bos, EAZA Conservation Campaign Coordinator. Phone: +31 20 5200753 / Email:

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