

# The Future of Herpetoculture

## Anthony Pierlioni, theTurtleRoom

**“Children are the world’s most valuable resource and its best hope for the future.”**

Those words spoken by John F. Kennedy should resonate with those of us who choose to dedicate our lives to chelonians. We understand that the majority of people in our lives, even close friends and family, do not entirely grasp what turtle keeping really means. Any turtle keeper will tell you, it takes serious dedication to do what we do for turtles and tortoises. We also work hard to continuously learn, studying any material we can get our hands on, especially when it concerns species of particular interest to us.

It is also our duty to understand the effort that must be made to advocate for turtles through additional means. If we fail to share our knowledge, much of our efforts will be in vain. Turtles have survived on this planet, virtually unchanged, for 200 million years; our work to conserve them, albeit important, is seemingly a small drop in the bucket, even going forward.



Cade Napoletano shows off two of his favorite tortoise species - A Russian tortoise, *Agrionemys horsfieldii*, and a Hermann’s tortoise, *Testudo hermanni*. Photo by Carin Napoletano.



Greyson and Ryan, children of TTPG veterinarian Cord Offermann, have been caring for turtles and tortoises since they could walk. Here they are scratching the neck of a Galapagos tortoise at the Gladys Porter Zoo in Brownsville, Texas. Photo by AJ Offermann.

Eighty years from now, when our personal efforts are history, we should hope that future generations of turtle advocates carry on our work and the work of those who came before us – both in situ and ex situ.

There tends to be competition between keepers, so information can be withheld, at times, from the general public. Other times, we are so busy taking care of our animals, or with life in general, that we don’t have time to get information out there about our passion for turtles and



Evan Thiss shows off a very rare field herping find - a Blanding's turtle, *Emys blandingii* - in Iowa. Photo by Eric Thiss.

tortoises, their care in captivity, their conservation, and their lives in nature. We must at least make the effort to reverse such trends.

In my time with turtles, there has been no better feeling than that felt while observing the egg of an endangered turtle crack open, to reveal a pair of bright eyes looking back at me. With that said, a close second, is the feeling of joy that comes when an entire school of curious students and adults won't let me leave after a presentation, due to the volume of questions being asked. To them, it doesn't matter if we

It was a touching moment for five year old Adam Aponti to see a successful clutch of Incised wood turtles, *Rhinoclemmys p. incisa*, hatch on 6/8/14. Adam's dad, turtle breeder and enthusiast, Nick Aponti of NA Exotics, captured this event at his facility in Spring Hill, Florida. This was the first time Nick has had several clutchmates hatch within 24 hours of each other. These babies were produced from a group consisting of 2.3 long-term captive adults.



Anna Siatkowski proudly shows off her captive-hatched Snail-eating turtle, *Malayemys subtrijuga*. Photo by Gerard Siatkowski.





Tom Barker with an Alligator snapping turtle. Photo by David Barker.



Being a “turtle person” isn’t just about keeping a turtle as a pet. It’s also about enjoying them in nature and making their lives better. Recently, Brendan Salceies was able to save this Yellow mud turtle, *Kinosternon flavescens*, that was crossing the road in Brewster County, Texas. During the warm months, safely helping turtles cross roads is an almost daily routine for many conservationists, young and old, all over the United States. Photo by Damon Salceies.

work with Ploughshare Tortoises or Red-eared Sliders – we can make an impact.

Remember, that classroom you are sitting in, giving up a big part of your day to talk about turtles, may be home to the next Peter Pritchard, a future politician, or a future successful business-person who decides to contribute their fortunes toward chelonian conservation.

We can be responsible for impacting their lives, the way our lives were affected at one point by these amazing animals, making a small positive change for the future of chelonians as well.

Think also of the comments we see on Facebook and the large amount of



Cait Gurley with an African spurred tortoise. Photo by Russ Gurley.

emails each of us gets from uninformed turtle keepers. At times, ignorance can test patience. In such instances, we must remember that we all started somewhere. I believe that such humility and the willingness to help one another is what will set us apart from other herpetoculturists.

Our greatest hope is to develop our most valuable resources, by encouraging our passion, humility, and study habits in the next generation of turtle enthusiasts. It is probable that by continuing to be available, collaborative and academic, we do as much for chelonians as we do through the development of assurance colonies.

The future of our dearest creatures depends on it.



Mack Stewart helps his parents, Tyler and Sarah Stewart of Tortoise Supply feed the Russian tortoises (above) and take weights and measurements of their Radiated tortoises (below). Photos by Sarah Stewart.



Learning about the Star tortoise, *Geochelone elegans*, at The Turtle Party in Nashville, Tennessee. Photo by Mallory Clark.



Anakin Michael (left) with his Marginated tortoise. This photo was taken the day he and his father, Michael Thathuvaswamy, were examining their tortoises for an annual health checkup. Michael is an active member of TTPG and the Sacramento Turtle and Tortoise Club who put on an educational festival called “Turtlerama” each year in Sacramento. Photo by Michael Thathuvaswamy.



Erica Fife is amazed at the beautiful markings on one of her uncle’s captive-hatched Star tortoises. Photo by Jerry Fife.





Moz Mullen, 9 years old (left) and Jake Mullen, 7 years old (right), are showing *Cuora zhoui*, one of the rarest species of turtle in the world, and a large *Chelodina expansa*, a giant Snake-necked turtle from Australia. Both are from their dad's breeding programs. Like their dad, Bill Mullen, they both like turtles a lot. They know the Latin names for many of the species they keep and they are very helpful with caring for their dad's large turtle collection. Both are enthusiastic when it comes to turtle feeding time. During their home school studies, turtle husbandry is one of their subjects. They learn where these animals come from, their habitats, ranges, seasonal temperature information, incubation techniques, preferred food items, courtship and breeding behaviors, and much more. They understand that turtles and tortoises are in serious trouble in nature and need our help. Their mom and dad hope that they keep their passion for wildlife throughout their lives. We are so happy to have them as part of our future herpetoculturists section and we are sure they will become crusaders for turtle conservation just like their dad. Photo by Bill Mullen.



Though we don't really think they are strange, Belle Friant, Jaycee Smith, and Auna Friant enjoyed learning about African spurred tortoises at the First Baptist Church's "Weird Animals" fun night in Ada, Oklahoma. Photos by Russ Gurley.



**BE SURE TO “LIKE”  
the TURTLE  
AND TORTOISE  
PRESERVATION  
GROUP on FACEBOOK!**

Ellie Bickel feeds her Red-footed tortoise, Cherry. Ellie and her mom, Susan Tiedemann Bickel care for seven species in their sunny Florida home including a Matamata, a *Geoclemys hamiltoni*, a Three-striped mud turtle, a ‘stinkpot’ (Common musk turtle), a Painted turtle, and a Cooter she caught herself (which will be released when it is older). Ellie loves to feed Cherry but her favorite turtle chore is to catch the food for Leafy, the Matamata. Once a week Ellie’s dad

takes her dip netting at a local pond and they catch little mollies and other small fish to feed Leafy. She keeps two freshwater pond aquariums of the fish, crayfish, and glass shrimp that she thinks are too pretty or interesting to be turtle food. She loves those tanks! In addition, each year, Ellie has an annual plant sale to benefit Loggerhead Marinelifelife Center in Juno Beach, Florida.



Charlotte, Oliver, and Abigail Whitmer are enjoying a sunny afternoon in the yard with an affectionate Galapagos tortoise. Photo by Jerry Fife.



Cayla Garner and Dozer at the Tennessee Safari Park’s Keeper for a Day Program. Cayla wants be a reptile keeper someday. Photo by Mallory Clark.



Future tortoise conservationists? We hope so! These young people are learning about tortoises at the Tennessee Safari Park during their Reptile Awareness Day. Photo by Mallory Clark.



Steven, Claude, and Jon Conley and friend, spent the afternoon with Wrecker at the Tennessee Safari Park during their Reptile Awareness Day. Photo by Mallory Clark.



Sacramento Turtle Club member, Lori Lo Dell, took this photo of her granddaughter, Danika Leibel, 5 years old, feeding her inheritance, Panzy 24, Tiger 15, and Bradley 18. Turtle and tortoise clubs around the country help educate children and new keepers about captive care, feeding, and other important issues related to chelonians.



Caoimhe helps her dad, Russ Gurley, by making salads, removing trays of uneaten food, doing water changes, and many of the daily chores associated with maintaining a large chelonian collection. Here she is holding a female Golden Greek tortoise, *Testudo graeca terrestris*. Photo by Russ Gurley.



Adylea Flagle enjoys helping her dad, Ari, take care of their Spotted turtles. We hope Adylea and many others like her will become turtle conservationists one day. Photo by Ari Flagle.

**REPTILE SUPER SHOW**  
**WORLD'S LARGEST REPTILE EXPO**  
August 9-10, 2014 Los Angeles, Ca.  
January 10-11, 2015 Los Angeles, Ca.  
July 11-12, 2015 San Diego, Ca.

*Reptile Super Show* is a fun and educational environment for the reptile enthusiast in your family. We promote conservation through education and captive breeding. We hope to see you soon!



Ava Rapley carefully cradles a hatching Gulf Coast box turtle, *Terrapene carolina major*, produced in her backyard. This hatchling can grow to eight inches and can be brown or black with yellow striping or blotching. Photo by Mike Rapley.



Young turtle enthusiast Parker Rapley discovered this young Texas map turtle, *Graptemys versa*, while exploring the Llano River, a tributary of the Colorado River, near Junction, Texas with his family. Photo by Mike Rapley.



Kainon and Riley Rheinhardt hanging out with a 7 year old captive-hatched Aldabra tortoise, *Aldabrachelys gigantea*. These tortoises originate from the islands of the Aldabra Atoll. Photo by Jessica Rheinhardt.



RIPARIAN FARMS

Richard Fife

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