



# Asian Turtle Program & Turtle Conservation Centre

Protecting today so we can see tomorrow...



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For more current news and updates on tortoise and freshwater turtle conservation in Asia, visit our website: [www.asianturtleprogram.org](http://www.asianturtleprogram.org)



Big headed turtle (*Platysternon megacephalum*).  
Photo credit: Hoang Van Ha – ATP/IMC

## Help us keep the Turtle Conservation Centre going throughout the current crisis

Right now, the world is going through an unprecedented crisis; people around the world are in lockdown while we hope and pray that the coronavirus pandemic passes swiftly and with as little cost to human life as possible. In Vietnam, and at the Turtle Conservation Centre (TCC) of Cuc Phuong National Park (CPNP), we are also struggling to cope with governmental restrictions; CPNP was closed to tourists for some weeks and is only now opening up again, and the movement of animals has been severely limited.

Although Vietnam has been doing a fantastic job in containing the spread of COVID-19, with only 288 cases and 0 deaths at the time of writing (11<sup>th</sup> May 2020). Our dedicated staff are still able to come into the centre every day to continue caring for over 1,000 endangered turtles, but we are struggling to get some materials that we need, such as construction and maintenance

materials and some items of food. We are also concerned about the longer term effects of the pandemic. In particular, it might severely impact wild releases of tortoises and freshwater turtles and conservation breeding plans for this year and next.

What is frustrating is we have some groups of animals who are eligible for release, having just passed through both health screening (including testing for Mycoplasma and Herpesvirus), and genetic screening. Right now we have almost 70 Big-headed Turtles (*Platysternon megacephalum*), 18 Bourret's Box Turtles (*Cuora bourreti*), 13 Indochinese box turtle (*Cuora galbinifrons*) and 03 Keeled box turtles (*Cuora mouhotii*) are all being maintained in isolation awaiting release, some are waiting for criminal cases to be closed, but many can be released as soon as the lockdown has eased.

We also have a successful breeding program for a number of important species, none more so than the critically endangered and endemic Vietnamese Pond Turtle (*Mauremys annamensis*). After a significant amount of successful conservation breeding of this species, we had over 200 hatchlings last year, and this year we could incubate a further 200 eggs, but if we are to do this we need to increase the short term holding capacity at the centre while making plans to release some individuals this year at one of a number of historical sites identified for the species, these are not protected areas as the species is not currently known from any.

With funding looking challenging for this year, next year and possibly beyond, we are having to make some tough choices. Can we continue to keep receiving confiscated animals in the coming months? Should we be breeding these priority species which are endangered and critically endangered, or should we be destroying the eggs if there is insufficient space and resources to keep them properly?

We have already developed an emergency plan for staffing if COVID-19 becomes more widespread in Vietnam. We thank our many different donors, and hope the plans for breeding and releases can go ahead, but we also need additional funding and support.

If you are able to support please send a donation via PayPal ([support@asianturtleprogram.org](mailto:support@asianturtleprogram.org)) or contact [info@asianturtleprogram.org](mailto:info@asianturtleprogram.org) for more details.

Press release: Tim McCormack - ATP/IMC  
Date: 11<sup>th</sup> May 2020

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Bourret's box turtle (*Cuora bourreti*)  
Photo credit: Nguyen Thu Thuy – ATP/IMC



Indochinese box turtle (*Cuora galbinifrons*).  
Photo by: Nguyen Thu Thuy – ATP/IMC.



Vietnamese Pond Turtle (*Mauremys annamensis*), a sub-adult hatched at the TCC.  
Photo credit: Timothy McCormack – ATP/IMC