



COMMUNIQUÉ
TURTLE SURVIVAL ALLIANCE

AN IUCN PARTNERSHIP NETWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE CAPTIVE MANAGEMENT OF FRESHWATER TURTLES AND TORTOISES

TSA Announces Roti Island Snakeneck Importation

The Roti Island snakeneck, *Chelodina mccordi*, is arguably one of the most endangered species of chelonian on the planet. Although a thorough population survey has never been undertaken, a 6-day habitat search in October of 2001 yielded only one subadult male. Ranked as Critically Endangered by the IUCN Red List, and considered 'commercially extinct' by importers, this species is one of the Turtle Survival Alliance's highest priorities for captive management.

Through a collaborative effort by numerous TSA Partners, the *Chelodina mccordi* TMG recently imported 47 captive-bred turtles from Europe. All were bred by Oliver Römpf from his group of wild-caught founder stock. These specimens have been distributed among eight individual and institutional partners of the TSA. Five recipients held existing stock, and two of these already had captive breeding success prior to receiving the imported specimens. These new bloodlines bolster the genetic potential of the North American captive population. Recipients have agreed to provide turtles in exchange for those they received once sufficient breeding has occurred. These specimens will then be transferred to Europe where they will supplement the TSA-Europe's bloodlines.

Successful breeding groups currently exist in six US and at least three European facilities, including both zoos and private breeders. Though founder representation is relatively low at around 12-15 turtles, sufficient bloodlines exist to effectively maintain this captive population for long-term survival if the genetic potential is carefully managed. A studbook, in preparation at the Columbus Zoo, will be an important tool toward realizing this goal.

Preparations are currently being made to sample all possible founder specimens for DNA typing. Kits are being assembled with detailed instructions for drawing blood for analysis at the lab of Dr. Michael Forstner at Southwest Texas University. A grant proposal to the Columbus Zoo is also in preparation to provide funding for this genetics work. Determining relationships within existing captive founder populations will help ensure that genetic integrity is maintained within the captive-bred population.

Additional fieldwork to better ascertain the status of *Chelodina mccordi* in the wild is much needed. A small grant from the Turtle Conservation Fund (TCF) was awarded this year that will send noted chelonian biologist Gerald Kuchling to Roti Island to conduct some brief field surveys.

Anyone interested in participating in the *C. mccordi* TMG is urged to contact Paul Vander Schouw at chelidman@tampabay.rr.com.

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