



Activities of the TSA Rescue Committee

In response to the growing number of confiscated turtles that we are now routinely asked to handle, the Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA) has established a **Rescue/Rehab Committee** to assist with seizures by U.S. authorities. So far the group has developed solid working relationships with six regional USFWS offices and has established an effective network and system for handling large numbers of confiscated turtles.

The mission of this committee is to respond as quickly as possible to the request for assistance, arrange for transport, evaluate the animal's health and condition and provide medical treatment if necessary. The group notifies the respective Taxon Management Groups (TMGs) and Placement Committee of the status of the animals so they are placed as quickly as possible and in alignment with TMG as well as TSA goals. The TSA co-chairs are kept informed on a regular basis about confiscations, legal issues and financial aspects. Sounds fairly simple! However, that's just the beginning.

To date each confiscation has been different from the last. Each regional governmental agency works independently from the other, and generally has different placement and chain of custody requirements. The health status varies, from animals ready to be placed on arrival to those requiring prolonged intensive care and with special needs. For each seizure or placement situation, the numbers can range from one or two animals to several hundred.

TMG TURTLES

After the Rescue/Rehab Committee takes possession, each respective TMG coordinator is notified of the confiscation. If the coordinator declines, or if their TMG holdings are full, then the animals are referred to the Placement Committee. Again, the agencies have varying expectations with respect to disclosure and placement requirements.

NON-TMG TURTLES

If the species is not managed by a TMG, then the TSA Rescue/Rehab Committee is responsible for all aspects of the confiscation. This includes transportation from the seizing authority, medical costs, collecting processing fees and placement into suitable homes.

PROCESSING FEES

What goes into the determining the processing fee charged per turtle? Beginning with the initial call from the confiscating agency, transportation must be arranged to receive the turtles. Airport pick up (sometimes 8 hours round trip) has to be arranged, and housing set up. Medical evaluations and treatments, bringing in vet consultants, daily husbandry and care, and recording/reporting information to the record keeper, all require time and expense.

Animals have to be fed, cleaned and maintained, sometimes for extended periods, again requiring man-hours, dedication and the use of a partner's facilities. TMG species are individually identified when possible with a permanent identifier such as an AVID chip, another \$7 expense. Records must be maintained and reports filed during this period, all adding up to a significant investment of time and resources on behalf of a dedicated group of professionals. Regardless if the turtles survives or dies an expense is incurred to maintain them. It is based on this widely varying and myriad array of expenses that the processing fees are based. To a considerable degree it is the processing fees that allow the Rescue and Rehab Committee to be prepared to respond quickly to these confiscations.

The **TSA Rescue/Rehab Committee** is the sole manager of the processing fees for non-TMG animals. Due to little or no interest from the general membership, many of these species are placed in homes without charging a processing fee. For TMG-managed species, it is agreed that a portion of the processing fee is available to support in-situ conservation programs. In other words fees generated from the processing of Indian star tortoises could go to support the TSA's developing program there at the Madras Croc Bank Trust.

Turtle Placements from 2001 to February 2004

2001 = 23
 2002 = 338
 2003 = 533
 2004 = 50

Species Received from 2001 to February 2004

<i>Batagur baska</i>	<i>Kinixys spekii</i>
<i>Carettochelys insculpta</i>	<i>Leucocephalon yuwonoi</i>
<i>Clemmys insculpta</i>	<i>Pelomedusa subrufa</i>
<i>Cuora amboinensis</i>	<i>Pelusios niger</i>
<i>Geochelone elegans</i>	<i>Phrynops nasutus</i>
<i>Geochelone carbonaria</i>	<i>Podocnemis unifilis</i>
<i>Geochelone denticulata</i>	<i>Terrapene carolina</i>
<i>Heosemys spinosa</i>	<i>Testudo graeca</i>
<i>Kinixys homeana</i>	

RESCUE/REHAB COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Annabel Ross • Bill Ninesling
 Dr. Chris Tabaka • Dr. Greg Fleming • Lonnie McCaskill