



CHELONIAN
ADVISORY GROUP



Chelonian Biology, Conservation, and Management Course

**Sponsored by the Association of
Zoos & Aquariums (AZA)
Chelonian Advisory Group**

in conjunction with the

Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA)

September 13-19, 2026

Location: TSA's **Turtle Survival Center (TSC)**, Cross, South Carolina.

Contact: Cris Hagen (chagen@turtlesurvival.org)

Course description: This hands-on learning experience focuses on basic biology and global conservation status of chelonians, the latest in husbandry and reproductive techniques, enclosure and facility design concepts, integration of captive management plans with conservation strategies and effective conservation messaging. Participants will learn not only about chelonian husbandry, but also how to connect with conservation projects, breeding program management, enrichment basics, chelonian health fundamentals, and more to improve chelonian management at their institutions and impact chelonians globally. Under the guidance of the AZA Chelonian Advisory Group (ChAG), the Chelonian Biology, Conservation, and Management Course provides knowledge about chelonians and skills for managing these species in captivity that are essential for anyone working directly with chelonians in a zoo, aquarium, conservation, or research setting.

Tuition Costs: \$900 per participant.

The registration fee above covers tuition, lunches, and snacks for each day of the course. Other expenses to expect that are not covered include travel to and from South Carolina, accommodations, and other meals. We will provide two dinners—an icebreaker and a final-day dinner (dietary requests will be available); other dinners will be on your own. There are two restaurants within a couple of miles of the TSC.

How to Register: Interested participants must submit a 1-page (maximum) letter by **May 1, 2026**, detailing your current occupation and describing why you want to attend the course, your prior experience with chelonians, career goals as they relate to chelonians, and what you expect to gain from the course. Letters should be submitted electronically to Cris Hagen (chagen@turtlesurvival.org).

Priority will be given to those from AZA and Zoological Association of America (ZAA) affiliated institutions. Others will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The course will be limited to 16 people, and applicants who are selected will be notified by email and provided registration and payment instructions.

Travel and Accommodations: Charleston International Airport (CHS) is the closest airport. Participants should plan to arrive between 12 PM and 5 PM on September 21, 2025.

A block of rooms to be reserved at **Blacks Camp**, 1370 Blacks Camp Rd, Cross, SC 29436; Phone 843-753-2231, just 2 miles from the TSC. It will be the participant's responsibility to make their own room reservation. Due to the remote location of the TSC and distance from the Charleston airport, TSA staff will do two airport runs on September 13, 2026, to pick up participants from the airport and transport them to Blacks Camp. We will also arrange to take people back to the airport for their departures. However, for improved mobility during your stay, some participants may want to consider renting a car if they are able to do so. During the course, TSA staff will pick up participants at Blacks Camp every morning and take them back in the evening if needed. Participants can choose to stay at other accommodations if they would like, but will need their own transportation to get to and from the TSC. The closest towns with a variety of lodging and

restaurant options include Santee, Moncks Corner, Goose Creek, and Summerville. All are a 25-40 minute drive from the TSC.

Curriculum Outline: *Topics and instructors are evolving and subject to change.

	Section	Topics	Lab	Instructors
Day 1	Ice Breaker (evening)	Meet and Greet	Dinner: Lowcountry Boil or BBQ (veg options)	
Day 2	What is a Turtle?	> Evolution > Zoogeography > Diversity > Anatomy > Physiology	> Identification and review of living families > Handling/restraint	> Dr. Kurt Buhlmann ² > Dr. Peter Paul van Dijk ³ > Cris Hagen ¹ > Dave Collins ^{1,8} > Bill Hughes ⁷
Day 3	Husbandry	> Habitat Design > Temperature > Habitat Quality > Water Quality > Identification and marking	> Enclosure design (indoor and outdoor) > Filtration > Water chemistry > ID/marketing techniques	> Michael Ogle ⁴ > Clinton Doak ¹ > Cris Hagen ¹ > Bill Hughes ⁷
Day 4	Husbandry, Diet and Behavior	> Diet and Nutrition > Social structure and stress > Brummation > Welfare and Enrichment	> Diet prep > Turtle pudding > Invertebrate culturing > Browse > Hibernacula > Enrichment	> Clinton Doak ¹ > Michael Ogle ⁴ > Cris Hagen ¹ > Bill Hughes ⁷ > Jeff Dawson ⁹ > Kathy Vause
Day 5	Reproduction and Veterinary Management	> Sexual dimorphism > Breeding encounters > Egg detection > Nest sites and egg laying > Incubation > Diapause > Juvenile husbandry > Veterinary topics: 1. Husbandry critical issues a. Water quality and disease 2. Diseases of interest	> Sexing > Egg incubation > Transport > Shipping	> Dr. Peter Paul van Dijk ³ > Clinton Doak ¹ > Cris Hagen ¹ > Bill Hughes ⁷ > Dr. Shane Boylan, DVM ¹ > Dr. Sean Perry, DVM > Dr. Charlie Innis, VMD ⁶

	Section	Topics	Lab	Instructors
		a. "Shell" disease b. Amoeba c. TINC d. Fungal diseases e. Mycoplasma 3. Reproduction		> Dr. Bonnie Raphael, DVM ⁵
Day 6	Field Research and Conservation Field Research and Conservation (continued)	> Research goals > Data collection > Trapping techniques > Mark-recapture techniques > Radio-telemetry > Threats and exploitation > Regulation > IUCN Red List ranking > Role of turtle conservation organizations > <i>In-situ</i> vs <i>Ex-situ</i> Management > Conservation breeding, assurance colonies and reintroduction > AZA SSP Program > AZA SAFE American Turtle Program	> Trapping techniques > Radio-telemetry Dinner: TBD	> Dr. Kurt ² Buhlmann > Dr. Tracey Tuberville ² > Dr. Peter Paul van Dijk ³ > Dr. Sean Doody ⁵ > Michael Ogle ⁴ > Dave Collins ^{1,8} > Bill Hughes ⁷
	Field Trip (Optional)	Option: Salleyland with Dr. Whit Gibbons ²		

¹Turtle Survival Alliance

²University of Georgia/Savannah River Ecology Laboratory

³Turtle Conservancy

⁴Zoo Knoxville

⁵University of South Florida

⁶New England Aquarium

⁷Tennessee Aquarium

⁸AZA SAFE American Turtle Program

⁹Saint Louis Zoo