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## Turtle Issues at CITES 1994

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The Ninth Conference of the Parties to CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora) took place in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, over two weeks from 7-18 November 1994. I participated as an Observer, on behalf of the Florida Audubon Society, the Chelonia Institute, and the IUCN/SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group.

In general, the deliberations were useful, even impressive, in that well over 100 sovereign nations were able to

debate wildlife issues, with courtesy, with exemplary background research by the Secretariat, and without the East-West rancor, or the polarization of the African nations (South Africa and its economic trading partners against the remainder of the continent) that characterized so many international conferences in recent decades. A great many decisions, some unanimous, some by majority vote, were made, and the working groups developing the position papers for complex or fractious issues went to great lengths, and very late nights, to develop positions of reasonable compromise.

Another positive aspect of the Conference was the extraordinary value – and volume – of the printed documents, position papers, and background information on agenda issues that was circulated to registered Observers as well as to National Delegations. These in many cases represent biological data unavailable in other sources, and are of permanent reference value.

There were several issues that directly or indirectly related to turtles and tortoises. Egypt proposed that the Egyptian dwarf tortoise, *Testudo kleinmanni*, be transferred from Appendix II to Appendix I, i.e., banned from international trade. This species, ironically, was being offered for sale in substantial numbers in Fort Lauderdale itself, at the very time of the Conference. Nevertheless, the tortoise is delicate in captivity, grows and breeds slowly, and has a very limited natural range in northeastern Libya and a few places in coastal Egypt and Israel. The Appendix I listing was passed unanimously.

Also passed with little debate was a proposal by the Netherlands and the United States to list the American box turtles, *Terrapene* spp. (*T. carolina*, *T. ornata*, and *T. nelsoni*), on Appendix II, while retaining *T. coahuila* on Appendix I. Although these turtles are generally thought of as common, there is substantial and growing evidence that many populations have declined markedly as a result of loss of habitat, highway mortality, and the species' intrinsically low reproductive potential and delayed maturity. Moreover, some of the taxa, especially the two described subspecies of *T. nelsoni* in northwestern Mexico, are decidedly rare. However, the progressive decline of many forms of *Terrapene* has taken a marked turn for the worse in recent years following the outlawing of the sale of Mediterranean tortoises (*Testudo* spp.) in western Europe. As a result, dealers have turned to other taxa, including various species of both *Kinixys* (hinge-back tortoises) and *Terrapene*, as substitutes. The Appendix II listing will not outlaw the international trade, but it will require that exports be subject to permit requirements, including certification by the U.S. Management Authority that the "take" of the species will not jeopardize wild populations. Box turtles will also have to be shipped under humane conditions, complying to international air transport standards, which should reduce the mortality and suffering of turtles in transit.

The assembled delegates are to be praised for their meritorious decisions on the box turtle and Egyptian tortoise issues. Nonetheless, such decisions do not happen spontane-

ously, but rather reflect years of behind-the-scenes work. Proposals regarding these chelonians had previously been prepared by the IUCN/SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group and its Turtle Recovery Program, the IUCN/SSC Trade Specialist Group, the Wildlife Conservation Society, and associated environmental and other NGOs.

The *Terrapene* proposal, first recommended by the NGOs in 1992, was not initially supported by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, who cited both a lack of trade data and strong opposition from the wildlife trade lobby. However, in 1994, the proposal to list *Terrapene* was reactivated. Trade data now demonstrated that since 1992, tens of thousands of box turtles had been exported from the USA. Eventual acceptance of the proposal by the U.S. government followed strong and effective lobbying and further quantitative data supplied by the Turtle Recovery Program, the IUCN/SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group, the Wildlife Conservation Society, the New York Turtle and Tortoise Society, and the Humane Society of the United States.

The Egyptian tortoise proposal was accepted in large part because of quantitative — and extremely disturbing — status data generated by a field survey funded by the Turtle Recovery Program, that demonstrated that the situation of this diminutive tortoise was far more precarious than previously acknowledged. This documentation led Egypt to propose the species for Appendix I.

Additionally, the Parties made adjustments to the status of the Indian flapshell turtle, *Lissemys punctata*, partially reflecting the fact that the form originally listed on Appendix I as *Lissemys punctata punctata* is now known as *Lissemys punctata andersoni*. Moreover, since it is now generally recognized that this is actually one of the most abundant turtles in the Indian subcontinent, the species as a whole was transferred to Appendix II. The status of *Lissemys scutata* was not unequivocally clarified — if this taxon is considered a subspecies of *L. punctata*, then it is included in the Appendix II designation — but if considered a separate species, then it is not listed in the Appendices. However, in its position paper on the proposals, IUCN Species Survival Commission and TRAFFIC Network (1994) listed the taxon *L. (p.) scutata* as a provisional subspecies of *L. punctata*, thus apparently including it in the Appendix II listing.

A matter of great importance to all Specialist groups, and probably the most important issue of the Conference, pertained to the development of new and “objective” rules for the listing of new taxa in the Appendices. These were strongly opposed by many conservation NGOs, on the grounds that few species are likely ever to be sufficiently well known as to generate the numerical data required for listing, and also that excessive attention to specific numbers, with comparable numerical criteria for all species from brain corals to elephants, was biologically nonsensical. Nevertheless, the draft criteria had consumed a tremendous amount of time and money, especially by IUCN, and there was a prevailing consensus among the Party Nations that some sort of revision of the old “Berne Criteria” was necessary. The

final agreement that emerged from the Conference was a masterful finding of communality among many groups with profoundly different philosophies. While not backing away entirely from the numerical criteria, the final document incorporated wording to the effect that the numbers given were for purposes of example only, it being impossible to give numerical values that were applicable to all taxa, and that there were many cases in which the numerical guidelines would not apply.

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## IN MEMORIAM

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### Leo Brongersma — An Appreciation

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Leo Daniël Brongersma, the dean of European marine turtle biologists, was born in Bloemendaal, the Netherlands, on 17 May 1907. He died on 24 July 1994 in Leiden, his home during both his professional life and his retirement, just a few miles from his birthplace. A quintessential Dutchman, he liked to consider himself a citizen of Friesland, a linguistically distinct province in the far north of the Netherlands.

Brongersma's retirement years were long, and his name may not be as well known to younger marine turtle students as it should be. He served as Director of the Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie for many years, until he reached the mandatory retirement age of 65 in 1972. He then served for four years (1972–1976) as acting director of the Rijksmuseum van Geologie en Mineralogie, and had many honorific titles and decorations, including *Ridder* in de Orde van de Nederlandse Leeuw, *Officier* in de Orde van Oranje-Nassau, and *Professor Extraordinarius* in systematic zoology at the Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden. He was also an Honorary Foreign Member of the American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists. No marine turtles are named after him (only Agassiz and Kemp have that distinction), but his patronyms include a Sumatran race of the blood python (*Python curtus brongersmai*), a toad (*Bufo brongersmai*), and at least 15 other vertebrate and invertebrate taxa.