

TURTLE POETRY

Editorial Introduction. — This section is devoted to poetry involving turtles, representing either reprinted previously published or new unpublished material. We encourage our readers to submit poetry or songs for consideration, either their own material or work by other authors. Poems may be submitted to Wallace J. Nichols, School of Renewable Natural Resources, Wildlife Ecology, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721 or Anders G.J. Rhodin, Chelonian Research Foundation, 168 Goodrich Street, Lunenburg, MA 01462.

Our desire is to share with our readers the beauty and wonder of turtles as expressed through the art of the poem or song. In the sense that the relationship between man and turtles is multifaceted, so too is turtle poetry. The poems we publish here will reflect that complexity, from poems of pure admiration for the creatures themselves to others reflecting the utilization of turtles and their products. Some poems will reflect man's use of the turtle for sustenance, others will stress man's need to preserve and protect turtles. Some will deal with our emotional interactions with turtles, others will treat turtles light-heartedly or with seeming disrespect, but all will hopefully help us to better understand both the human and the chelonian condition, and remind us that the turtle holds a sacred place in all our hearts.

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Adelita sleeps...

BARBARA GARRISON¹

do you ever find yourself
thinking of her
in the middle of the day?

sister of mercy
adrift in the world
her carapace around her
like a habit
following the liturgy of longitude
like the Stations of the Cross
the draw string of dream
gathering with each dive

a sea shadow
cradled in the arms
of the great Turtle Mother

the Virgin of Cobre guiding
through the dangerous sea

the black sand memory
of her natal beach
ringing her course
in peals of instinct

cartographer
explorer
world traveler
Adelita sleeps

a Shinto priestess
leads the way
a goddess path
from Mexico
to the arribada
on a distant
Kyushu shore



Adelita swims away with transmitter. Photo © Robert E. Snodgrass.



Adelita's track across the Pacific Ocean from Mexico to Japan.

Caretta's Return

BARBARA GARRISON¹

Part I

Rosita clearly had an agenda
moving west twelve miles a day
from Bahia de Los Angeles on the Sea of Cortez
equatorial currents southern and northern in a clockwise gyre

Marked by man for her own good
labeled and tagged against further entanglements
seven years a captive
biding her time

Turning from his hand she languished listless and slow
refusing the lobster and the soft shell crab
swimming slow desperate circles
with her eyes closed

Until one night tiring of it all
he left her on a beach near Punta San Miguel
saying he was not drunk swearing he heard her say
"My name is caretta-caretta"
and she shuffled into the sea like a geisha

Summer ended Antonio went away
back to Arizona and the university where they say
he got low grades trying to forget the years with her
the indifference in her eyes
how nothing he did was ever enough

He took to drinking sake and ginseng tea
at the Japanese friendship garden
alone
no friends

somewhat troubled by dreams of mermaids turtles and sand
he tried meditation
studied Asian art
and worked at the .99 cent store saving his fare to Baja
where he lived in a shack by the sea

One day he burned his papers
the research and reports
an application to the U.S. Fish and Game
the sightings and the counts
disappearing into sand like a tortoise

Part II

Caretta-Caretta glides into the sea
deep into the underworld as if by telemetry
gorgonian coral sargasso and plume
the latitudes of peril like a lodestone spinning her ancient back

Lady Murasaki of the silken dive adrift
from Mexico with the moon in bridal combs of pearl and
tortoise shell
to the breakers near Kyushu
to die in sight of land

a snarl of nets and lines
a tangled dream held fast
drowning with the evening tide
12,000 miles full circle

The eggs she carried
a delicacy for the fisherman's table

Editorial Comment. — For many years the occurrence of Pacific loggerhead turtles (*Caretta caretta*) along the coast of Baja California, Mexico, has been a point of discussion among biologists and naturalists. As there are no known eastern Pacific loggerhead nesting rookeries, did these turtles originate from an undiscovered rookery somewhere along the Pacific coast of the Americas? Or did the turtles make the trans-Pacific journey to Baja's rich coastal waters from the closest known rookeries in southern Japan and Australia? Genetic analysis of turtles caught in Pacific driftnet fisheries or feeding near Baja California suggested the latter — that they did in fact migrate across the vast Pacific. In the summer of 1996 a bi-national Mexican and U.S. research team provided the first direct evidence of east to west trans-Pacific migration by tagging two loggerheads named *Rosita* and *Adelita* that had been wild-caught in Mexico and held long-term captive there. These turtles had previously been used by Bowen et al. (1995) in their study of loggerhead genetics and were known to be of a Japanese haplotype. Despite being held in captivity for 6 to 10 years, when the turtles were released off the coast of Mexico they immediately migrated back across the Pacific Ocean, a trip of over 12,000 km. *Rosita*, who was tagged with flipper tags, took about 478 days to reach Japan, where she died in a fisheries gill net. *Adelita*, who was equipped with a satellite transmitter, made the passage to Japan in about 368 days, and also appears to have died in local fisheries. The researchers recognized the novelty of and potential interest in *Adelita*'s migration and began posting the satellite telemetry data to an e-mail list of teachers and students around the world. The interest was tremendous and the project moved to a turtle web site (Turtle Trax: <<http://www.turtle.org/adelita.htm>>) containing the data and *Adelita*'s trajectory. Barbara Garrison was one of several creative teachers to incorporate the project into her curriculum and to attract one of the researchers to visit her students. Her enthusiasm and talent as a poet inspired her to write these two poems.

The accompanying underwater photograph by Robert Snodgrass shows *Adelita* off the coast of Mexico with her satellite transmitter in place. The global map shows the trajectory of her migration across the Pacific Ocean from Mexico to Japan as tracked by satellite telemetry. The information presented is a stark and graphic reminder of the scope of the international movements and migrations carried out by all sea turtles, including hawksbills, which render them vulnerable to threats both on the open oceans and in the territorial waters of many nations. Sea turtles represent a global shared resource which deserves the highest level of international conservation cooperation.