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Editorial Comment

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It has been over a year since the publication of our previous issue of *Chelonian Conservation and Biology* (CCB), and I apologize for the lengthy delay. Much has happened this past year to impact the timeliness of our production schedule.

Shortly after finishing the previous issue I became suddenly and severely debilitated from life-threatening bilateral fulminating pneumonia caused by Influenza virus followed rapidly by opportunistic Legionnaire's Disease. I required Intensive Care hospitalization for over a week, first in my community hospital, then at university-based Boston Medical Center. The expert medical and nursing care I received from the professional and caring health care providers at these outstanding facilities saved my life and allowed me to return to my own efforts to help save turtles. I owe them all a huge debt of gratitude and will forever remember the vulnerability and anxious fear one feels when faced with a life-threatening illness. Their professionalism and confidence in caring for me gave me the strength and reassurance I needed to help my own recovery. I will also always remember the heartfelt displays of support and encouragement I received from my many friends and colleagues in the global turtle conservation community during this difficult time. Thank you one and all for your caring words and support which helped me to recover and regain the strength necessary to once again pursue my turtle conservation efforts.

The severe illness left me physically and emotionally drained and unable to resume a full work schedule for about 3-4 months. During this lengthy recovery phase the production schedule of CCB suffered as I was only able to focus on just keeping up with my regular profession in the medical world. Fortunately, I have now been fully recovered for several months and have begun to catch up again on backlogged turtle work, including the production of CCB. This special focus issue on North American *Gopherus* tortoises will be followed quickly by the next issue (on general turtle conservation and biology) which is already essentially completed.

Concurrently with my recovery, a new initiative for turtle conservation, the Turtle Conservation Fund (TCF), has been developed over the last several months, and much of my time and energy have been devoted to helping launch this new effort. Conceived in May 2002 and launched 5 months later in October, the TCF has embarked on an ambitious fundraising and strategizing program to help support and direct turtle conservation efforts worldwide. The TCF was founded as a partnership initiative between three separate organizations: Conservation International/Center for Applied Biodiversity Science (CI/CABS), the IUCN/SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group (TFTSG), and the IUCN/SSC Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA). The TCF seeks to maximize resource support for a wide variety of global turtle conservation efforts through a combination of dedicated TCF donations from individuals and organizations plus in-kind and program-focused support from a broad array of TCF Alliance Partners. These TCF Alliance Partners currently number over 20 non-profit conservation organizations, including Wildlife Conservation Society, Chelonian Research Foundation, Fort Worth Zoo, University of Georgia Savannah River Ecology Laboratory, Island Foundation, Nando Peretti Foundation, Frankel Family Foundation, Disney Wildlife Conservation Fund, Columbus Zoo, Cleveland Zoological Society, Daytona Reptile Expo, Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden, American Zoo and Aquarium Association/Chelonian Advisory Group, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, Melbourne Zoo, European Association of Zoos and Aquaria, European Studbook Foundation, Reptiles Magazine, Zoo Atlanta, Chelonian Research Institute, International Center for Conservation of Turtles/Münster Allwetter Zoo, Rotterdam Zoo, and IUCN—The World Conservation Union/Species Survival Commission. With the help and support of our multiple donors and partners, we are certain to begin to make a major difference in global turtle conservation efforts.

The stated mission of TCF is to ensure that no species of tortoise or freshwater turtle becomes extinct



and that sustainable populations of all species persist in the wild. "Species" in this context encompasses all recognized taxonomic units, including species, subspecies, and distinctive or significant regional populations, and sustainable populations need to fulfill their ecological role in their native habitats. The mission of TCF will be achieved through facilitation and funding of coordinated global turtle conservation initiatives, including strategic partnership alliances and directed conservation action. This will include support for ex-situ captive breeding and management programs both in-range and out-of-range, in-situ protection and management of native populations, field-based conservation biology and applied research, field and trade surveys, threatened status and regulatory needs determinations, protected areas evaluations and development, and capacity building and other conservation endeavors as needed.

The TCF launched its efforts by producing *A Global Action Plan for Conservation of Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles: Strategy and Funding Prospectus 2002–2007*, published by Conservation International and Chelonian Research Foundation. This Global Action Plan was published recently and has been distributed to nearly 3000 recipients worldwide, including the entire CCB subscriber base.

It has become my privilege and honor to be selected Chair of the TCF (with Kurt A. Buhlmann as Executive Director), and I have expended considerable time and effort to help develop the Global Action Plan and to help seek the funding support from individual donors and TCF Alliance Partners to provide a successful and secure future for the TCF.

For all subscribers of CCB I encourage your participation and personal investment in the TCF effort to secure the future preservation of turtle species and their habitats. The TCF Action Plan sent earlier to all of you includes a solicitation letter and donation form. I urge all of you to please give generously—your contribution will make a real difference. Our turtle conservation efforts through the TCF depend upon sustainable charitable giving by people and organizations who look to the future. We need your help and vision to achieve our goals—please join our ranks in the global turtle conservation community by making a donation from your heart.

Donations may be sent to Conservation International, Turtle Conservation Fund, c/o Sal Spada, 1919 M St., NW, Suite 600, Washington DC 20036 USA. All donations are fully tax-deductible under US tax laws governing 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations. Thank you for your support.