

*Turtles on the Brink in Madagascar: Proceedings of Two Workshops on the Status, Conservation, and Biology of Malagasy Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles*  
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 and the poem also reprinted from *A Global Action Plan for Conservation of Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles*,  
 presented by the Turtle Conservation Fund and co-published by Conservation International and Chelonian Research Foundation (2002).

## Ancient Chelonians

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Ancient chelonians of lineage primeval  
 Their survival now threatened by man's upheaval

We gather together to celebrate our perception  
 Of turtles and their need for preservation and protection

For turtles forever to play their part ecological  
 To prosper and maintain their diversity biological

For turtle and tortoise, terrapin and kin  
 Their kind to preserve, their future to win

We must work together, I tell you from the heart  
 Whether we work together, or apart.

*Comment.* — I wrote this poem for my opening address at the Powdermill Conference on Freshwater Turtle Biology and Conservation in Laughlin, Nevada, in August 1999. Honoring the style of Robert Frost's "The Tuft of Flowers" I tried to capture the essence of how we must all work together to help save these chelonians that we care for with such passion. I read the poem again during my closing address at the Florida Conference on Freshwater Turtles in St. Petersburg, Florida, in October 1999. At each reading I sensed from the positive responses of listeners that there is a need for all of us in the conservation world to not only expound on our scientific knowledge, but also to openly express our passion and love for turtles. In expressing that passion, by whatever reasonable means possible, we may reach beyond our tight-knit scientific chelonian circles to start influencing, at least on an emotional level, those unconverted people with whom we must interact if we are to succeed in preserving the turtles of the world. We must all be ambassadors for turtle conservation at all levels of human interaction.

*Updated 2013 Comment.* — As I finished formatting and editing and putting the final touches on this monograph on *Turtles on the Brink in Madagascar*, I felt that I wanted to once again express my feelings about how important it is for all of us who love turtles to work together for their preservation and protection. By working together—among individuals, organizations, and institutions—and by demonstrating and sharing the passion that we all have for these endeavors and their importance, we are more likely to ultimately be successful, and to gradually build a collaborative and increasingly influential broadbased coalition of like-minded people and organizations and governments that share our vision of a world that values biodiversity and ecosystem services and the sustainable wealth of a healthy and richly diverse natural environment. The critically endangered turtles and tortoises of Madagascar are an integral and important part of that environment—indeed, they are radiant jewels in its crown—and more than worthy of and in desperate need of our utmost efforts to secure their future. I believe it is our moral imperative to work for the conservation of these amazing species.