

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 — This section is devoted to poetry involving turtles, representing either reprinted previously published or new unpublished material.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, 2103 Vallejo, San Francisco, CA 94123 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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Ancient Chelonians

ANDERS G.J. RHODIN¹

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.

Editorial 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.

¹ Composed August 1999