

Veröffentlichungen ARCO

ARCO-Nepal Newsletter 20- ISSN 2566-4832

2020/20



Content	page
• World Turtle Day 2020 during Corona Pandemie in Nepal	2
• Let's shellebrate and free the nets of threats	13
• Volunteering At Turtle Rescue & Conservation Centres	15

ARCO-Nepal and the editor of these newsletters, CEO Prof. Dr. Hermann Schleich are extremely proud to have such friends, followers and engaged young generation challenging the conservation and collaboration for a turtle survival in the 21st century. We say thank you so much to all!! Lets continue to save what still can be saved in Nepal!

Hermann Schleich

Membership declarations are posted on our website and on Facebook – just fill the form and send it to us by mail together with your membership fee.

ARCO-Nepal reg. soc.

Amphibian and Reptile Conservation of Nepal

c/o W. Dziakonski / Treasurer, Edlingerstr. 18, D-81543 München. w.dziakonski@yahoo.de

CEO & Editor: Prof. Dr. H. Hermann Schleich, Arco-Spain, E-04200 Tabernas/Almería

www.arco-nepal.de email: arco.nepal@gmail.com

Account-no. 1000099984 BIC SSKMDEMMXXX BLZ 70150000

Bank/Credit Institute: Stadtparkasse Muenchen - IBAN DE95701500001000099984

Membership contributions and any donations from SAARC and Non-European countries please pay directly upon our account at the

Himalayan Bank Ltd, Kathmandu (Thamel Branch), Nepal

Account no: 019 0005 5040014 / SWIFT HIMANPKA

SAARC countries please apply directly to trcc.arco@gmail.com

Few words

It is my pleasure to express my best wishes to ARCO-Nepal for the publication of ARCO-Newsletter 20 on the celebration of World Turtle Day 2020.

Even in the lockdown period of COVID-19, the world turtle day was celebrated unprecedentedly by virtual way. Now, TRCC has expanded its activities on turtle conservation in nationwide from Mechi to Mahakali. I am very happy seeing many young generations participating in this turtle conservation campaign. They have been much more aware from the vanishing creature such as turtles and promising to save them from being extinct.

Even in this pandemic, they are composing scientific literature and art such as fantasy, fiction, poems, short story, experiences of research fieldwork, travel account, autobiographic memoir, illustrative diagrams or model and paintings to create public aware for turtle conservation.

In this regard Shyam Kumar Pun (Chitwan), Omkar Bhatt (Kanchanpur), Balika Chapagain (Jhapa), Ashmita Shrestha (Sunsari), Sandeep Luitel (Jhapa), Samiksha Rai (Jhapa), Anjal Luitel (Lalitpur), Aavas Pradhan (Sarlahi), Bijay Rai (Sunsari), Ganita Subba (Bhaktapur), Julie Shrestha (Jhapa), Kashup Khatri (Bhaktapur), Kritagya Gyawali (Kaski), Manjita Kharel (Kirtipur), Pragati Khatriwada (Jhapa), Pragya Shrestha (Jhapa), Ram Chandra Wagle (Morang), Sajjan Regmi (Hetauda), Sandhya Dahal (Bhaktapur), Shishir Lamichhane (Chitwan), Shraddha Bhattarai (Kirtipur), Somy Bhattra (Jhapa), Srijana Timilsina (Chitwan) and Sweta Karki (Kathmandu) have played pioneer role by presenting beautiful and emotional article, poem, poster and art on different aspects of turtle fauna.

In such occasion I always remember my supervisor Prof. Dr. Hermann Schleich who contributed a lot of time and labour for our country to set up the base of herpetofauna conservation programme. He established a research organization, ARCO-Nepal so as to protect and promote the conservation of herpetofauna of Nepal permanently. This organization had completed herpetological survey throughout the country in two decades and contributed a reliable checklist of herpetofauna of Nepal enlisting about 56 species of amphibians and 140 species of reptiles respectively. Presently, TRCC program is also going on under his instruction and many young generations of scientists are being organized around it.

Now, TRCC also got right leadership from a Mr. Tapil Prakash Rai and he became Lead keeper and representative of it. All these turtle conservation activities are concerned with TRCC at SUMMEF. He has been a leading figure in the campaign of turtle conservation in Nepal. I congratulate him and to all his team members (TRCC-Turtle's Club) who have been devoted for turtle conservation.

Likely, in the occasion of world turtle day, I also congratulate to the whole body of Martyrs Memorial Foundation and Park for taking vital initiation to promote such conservation activities concerning TRCC programs for herpetofauna.

Lastly, I would like to remember: Save Turtle! Save Wetland! Save Forest! Save Environment!

Thank you.

Dr. K.R. Khambu Rai
Professor of Zoology
Mechi Multiple Campus,
Jhapa (Nepal)

World Turtle Day – May 23, 2020 during Corona Lockdown

Turtle Rescue and Conservation Centre – TRCC has been celebrating world turtle day past four years organizing programs and this year it is our fifth celebration. TRCC is the first organization in Nepal to celebrate world turtle day officially. Last year on this occasion Arjundhara municipality of Jhapa district was declared as first ever “Turtle Protected Municipality” in Nepal. The mayor of Arjundhara along with district forest officer, members of SUMMEF, experts, representative of community forests, teachers, students and journalists committed for the conservation of turtles.

But this year due to COVID-19 pandemic we could not organize any programs with physical presence. However, we were devoted to carry out virtual program with a prime motive to engage more people in turtle conservation. We published turtle material (Children’s drawing book, description of turtle species, awareness poster, etc) till May 23. At the same time we did announcement to submit creations (poster, art, story, poem, experience, photo, etc) for celebration of world turtle day.

In early morning of May 23, I was pondering - how to start the world turtle day? At the same time our collaborator Deepa Kulung informed me that one of her friends has kept Indian flapshell turtle as pet in Itahari municipality of Sunsari district. Deepa convinced her friend to release that beautiful animal in its natural habitat. In this way our celebration of world turtle day begun, which followed by publication of various creative works submitted by participants from all over Nepal.

From the establishment of TRCC-Turtle’s Club in 2016, it has become the strong pillar of TRCC. This year on the occasion of world turtle day they took a challenge of making incubator for turtle eggs. To prepare incubator at home, especially during this lockdown was not less challenging task. However, they succeeded in developing a workable incubator. It is the creation of very talented and intensely devoted (in turtle conservation) Sabin Adhikari, Saroj Chauhan, Roshan Pahari and Bigyan Kharel.



Fig. 1: From right Sabin Adhikari, Saroj Chauhan, Roshan Pahari and Bigyan Kharel with their constructed incubator.

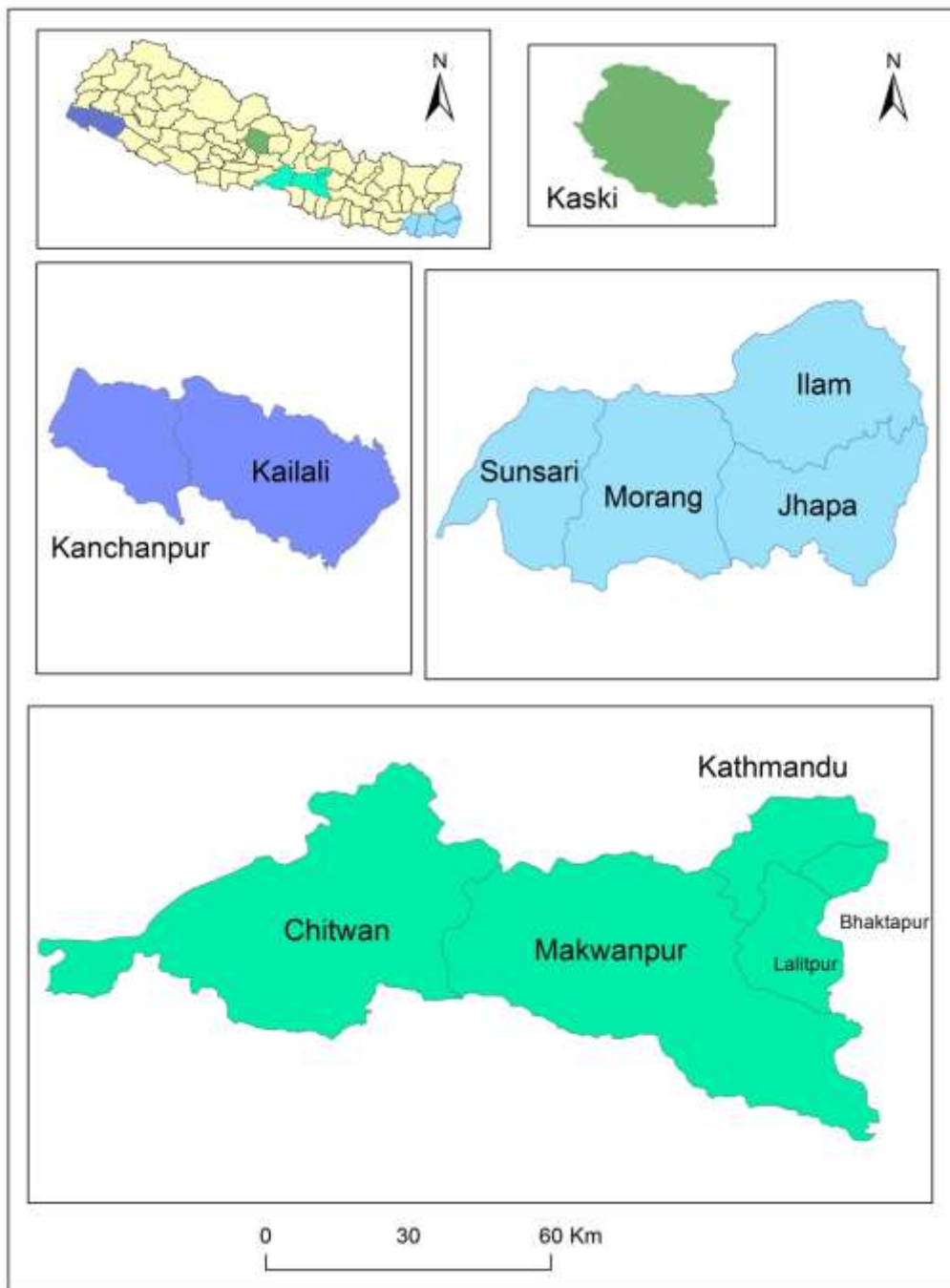


Fig. 2: Map of Nepal showing participants from 12 districts [Map prepared by Balika Chapagain] for World Turtle Conservation Day.

All together we received 33 creations from 12 districts of Nepal. One of our collaborators Balika Chapagain prepared a district map of participants. The friends contributing in world turtle day celebration are Aavash Pradhan, Anjal Kaushik Luitel, Ashmita Shrestha, Balika Chapagain, Bigyan Kharel, Bijay Rai, Ganita Subba, Julie Shrestha, Kahsup Khatri, Kritagya Gyawali, Manjita Kharel, Omkar Bhatt, Pragati Khatiwada, Pragya Shrestha, Ram Chandra Wagle, Sabin Adhikari, Sajjan Regmi, Samiksha Rai, Sandeep Luitel, Sandhya Dahal, Saroj Chauhan, Shiseer Khatiwada, Shishir Lamichhane, Shraddha Bhattarai, Shyam Kumar Pun, Somy Bhattra, Srijana Timilsina and Sweta Karki. All the creations are beautiful, unique and informative. These creations are published here and on facebook at interval every day till last day of May.

Tapil P Rai
Lead Keeper and Representative, TRCC (ARCO-Nepal and SUMMEF)

Conservation within the Conservation Area

The conservation area in Nepal mainly focuses on species-level conservation of large mammals. Turtles of Nepal have always been neglected. A limited number of research activities and conservation efforts have put turtles vulnerable. Immediate actions need to be taken for the effective conservation of these majestic species. Habitat loss, habitat fragmentation, and different anthropogenic activities are the major factors for the decline of their population. Most of the first-hand anthropogenic factors can be controlled to a certain limit inside the Protected Area (PA), though the secondary factors are still threatening their existence even inside PA. The wetlands are shrinking year by year. Some of the wetlands inside the conservation area are lacking water during summer. This primarily results in the habitat loss of animal and secondarily it reduces food availability. Other factors like eutrophication and ecological succession add up in the deterioration of their living environment. Multiple factors like these are playing a key role in harassing the existence of these species. The scanty population of turtles is demanding conservation efforts. Protecting these species may protect the whole wetland ecosystem. Turtles of Nepal need conservation; conservation within the conservation area or the next generation will see them on photographs and books only.



Omkar Bhatt (omkarbhatt34@gmail.com)
Freelance Ecologist / Wildlife Photographer
Bhimdatta, Kanchanpur, Nepal

Photos (right)

Top: Which way shall I go searching water!!!
Middle: Raani Taal, Beauty of Shuklaphanta National Park; Beauty without Water
Bottom: I died searching for water, my brothers must not...



World Turtle Day
May 23, 2020



The Moment I Encountered Elongated Tortoise in Wild

Indotestudo elongata (IUCN: Critically Endangered; CITES: Appendix II)

Engaging in wildlife research brings lot of thrills as well as surprises. One such moment is when we encounter wild species; especially the endangered and rare one is amazing. Such experiences are what keep us (researchers) from continuing our work with enthusiasm. Today, I would like to share one such experience I had during my field work.

As part of my thesis work, it was a kind of bliss to encounter Elongated tortoise (*Indotestudo elongata*) during my long and tiresome field work of searching tortoises. It was occupying the secondary habitat (burrows of porcupines) and hidden in leaf litters in Dahijhoda Community Forest of Jhapa District. I had an opportunity to note this majestic species in its natural habitat. With tiring field works filled with activities like sweeping floor to searching them in crevices, rolling down the hill while trying to look for signs, getting bitten from poisonous insects, etc was all worth with a sighting of single tortoise. Dealing with all these hardships for the conservation of species that still lack focus is what has inspired me keep going till date. A single sighting is definitely worth all the struggles we have to deal, from field works to harsh interactions with the local community.

In the end it was very productive facing several challenges and also getting opportunity to gain knowledge from research. I would heartily thank Sabin Adhikari (left) and Saroj Chauhan (middle) for continual support to achieve this blissful sighting.



Balika Chapagain (balikachapagain72@gmail.com)
M.Sc. 4th Semester (Thesis year)
Central Department of Environmental Science, TU, Kirtipur
She is associated with Turtle Rescue and Conservation Centre-TRCC, Jhapa

World Turtle Day

May 23, 2020



www.arco-nepal.de
trcc.arco@gmail.com, arco.nepal@gmail.com

World Turtle Day?

World Turtle Day is celebrated every year on 23rd May. The main objective of this day is to spread awareness about the protection of the natural habitat of one of the oldest group of reptiles-the turtles and tortoise across the globe. Looking back at the history of World Turtle Day, it was found that a team of husband and wife named Marshal Thompson and Susan Tellem who had an organization named American Tortoise Rescue (ATR) celebrated it for the first time in 2000. Susan and Marshal had founded ATR in 1990 when they came to realize that these beautiful hard-shelled reptiles were very close to extinction. They took this issue on international platform and planned to spread awareness about the conservation of various species of turtle and tortoise across the globe. This initiative led to the emergence of World Turtle Day (WTD). The official announcement of WTD was done in 2000. In 2000, when the journey of World Turtle Day was about to start, ATR put lot of efforts to educate, aware and encourage people about the protection of turtles and tortoise along with the loss of their habitat. In 2002, American Tortoise Rescue announced that World Turtle Day to be celebrated in May 23rd every year. Since then, every year on May 23rd, World Turtle Day is celebrated across the globe annually with the different themes focusing mainly in its protection. The theme of World Turtle Day 2020 is to focus on bringing attention and increasing the respect and knowledge for tortoise and turtles.

In Nepal, Amphibian and Reptile Conservation of Nepal (ARCO-Nepal) has been working effectively from the start of its establishment in 1997 for the protection and conservation of turtles. ARCO-Nepal in collaboration with concerning government bodies and local organizations has been conducting different educational seminars, protecting the turtle's habitat, educating and informing people about turtles through posters and pamphlets in World Turtle Day. Even though we are facing this hard times with the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic, we can be the part of turtle conservation by staying home. We can raise awareness about turtle protection through social media. Almost half of all turtle species alive today are endangered due to global warming and human activities. So, it is our responsibility to take all the preventative measures, be it controlling waste generation at home or discarding the use of plastic, to protect turtles. Turtles have survived the dinosaurs, and we must make sure that they survive the humans too.

Source: Earthreminder.com/world-turtle-day; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Turtle_Day



Sandhya Dahal (sandhyadahal26@gmail.com)
M.Sc. (Environmental) 1st Semester
Khopwa College, Bhaktapur

World Turtle Day

May 23, 2020



www.arco-nepal.de
trcc.arco@gmail.com, arco.nepal@gmail.com

Toto and Fogi

The gentle breeze made leaves of tree to flutter like butterfly wings. As it was a dense forest, the surrounding was silent and only the sound of flowing river and bird's song could be heard. Here in the forest different species of animals and birds lived, including a turtle named 'Toto'. He had no family members because they were all killed by humans and some of them died of diseases. So, he was the only one remaining in their whole group (species). But he was a good boy and had many friends. They used to call him 'Toto the turtle'. His friend's names were Fogi, Fily, Mika and many others. They used to play entire day at the bank of river. Every day they used to change the type of game to make it interesting. Some day they used to play hide and seek, while on other day swimming competition. If any sort of new or scary noise was heard, then they used to hide swiftly in safe places. On land, Toto used to remain still and withdraw its limbs and head. In this way it became disguised as nonliving objects. If near river then he immediately dived into water and disappeared.

The days were passing by. One day some people came to the forest while Toto and his friends were playing. Toto's friends ran as fast as they could to safety and Toto disguised as nonliving object. They all peeped from safety to understand the purpose of visiting forest by those people. Afterwards, they came to know that those people were not hunters but turtle researchers. And they had come here specifically to search Toto like species as they had found one a year ago. Though the researchers tried very hard, they were unsuccessful and at last they were returning. Seeing all this activity Toto instantly thought it could be his one of the family member that was found by those researchers. While he was lost in nostalgia, his friends were yelling at him to continue their play. They played as usual and returned home late that day.

Time was passing in its usual pace and the days were going on nicely. One fine day Toto looked very happy and he was sitting like chieftain. On seeing jovial mood of Toto, his best friend Fogi came near him and asked, "What's new today? You look very happy." Totoreplied with bright smile, "Today is mine day". The words of Toto made Fogi confused and he inquired more "What do it mean by your day? I can't understand anything". Then, Toto responded valiantly "Today, 23 May is **World Turtle Day**, which is entirely dedicated to our species. Humans are realizing their insanity and have started to conserve us. Today turtle lovers and conservationists celebrate turtle day all over the world by doing different types of awareness activities to alert more people." This saying of Toto made Fogi totally surprised and interrupts in the middle "Oh! Then you may find species same like you in future. Isn't it?" As their conversation got exciting, suddenly they heard some intruder's sound and both escaped to safety. After few minutes, they found out that farmers from the village had come to cut grass and collect firewood.

At present we do not know what Toto and his friends are doing.



www.arco-nepal.de
trcc.arco@gmail.com, arco.nepal@gmail.com



Samiksha Rai
(raisaamika364@gmail.com)
Student of Tower Temple -2
Management, Baramunda, Jhapa

World Turtle Day

May 23, 2020



कछुवाको पुकार



अञ्जल कौशिक लुइटेल
अजनघारा ०६, भक्तपुर

एमएससी तेथो सेमेस्टर
पाटन संयुक्त क्याम्पस
पाटनबोझा, ललितपुर

Email: kauanjali6@gmail.com

www.arco-nepal.de
trcc.arco@gmail.com, arco.nepal@gmail.com

हामी त जलघर प्राणी हौं, एक चाही जमिनमा पाईन्छन
विनले हामीलाई सरीशृप वर्गमा राख्दछन ।
भारपात, फलफूल, च्याउ, हाडखो किरा र स-साना
मरेका माछा आदि नै हाम्रो मनपर्ने हो खाना ॥

सिमसार, खोला आदिमा बस्दछौं रमाई
सिकारी पापीले किन देखन सक्दैन हामीलाई ?
दुःख र उदक लाग्दछ, मान्छेको भ्रम देखेर
बवाई र मासुका लागि भन्दै पत्रगन्धन छेकेर ॥

पुज्दछन भगवान विष्णुको दोस्रो अवतार भनेर
सङ्कटमा छौं नि अचेल अतिक्रमण बढेर ।
डाइनासोर पनि साथी थिए हाम्रा, छैनन ती मासीए
डर लाग्छ हाम्रो होला त्यही हाल संरक्षण नभए ॥

"खपटा राखे रक्षा पो हुन्छ", भन्छन रे कोही कोही
"रक्षा त हुन्छ हामी बचिमा", भन्छछौं हामी यै ।
बुद्धिमान भए ए मान्छे यस्तो हकत छोडीदेउ
संरक्षण गर्नका लागि तिमी हातमा हात जोडीदेउ ॥

यस पृथ्वीमा हरेक जीवको आफ्नै छ अस्तित्व
तिमी नै श्रेष्ठ, तिमी हो सबलाई बचाउने दायित्व ।
समाजमा व्याप्त भ्रमलाई धिर्न दियो बाल ज्ञानको
भ्रमको खेती नगर, गरन प्रचार विज्ञानको ॥

रक्न देउ हामीलाई हाथै रखानमा, सकभर बचाउ
सङ्कटमा हामी परेको देखे केन्द्रमा लिएर आउ ।
एकदिन दिवस मनाउँदा मात्र केही हुन्न हामीलाई
लागि पर न ए हरेक मानव, यसरी सधैं नै ॥



World Turtle Day

May 23, 2020



कछुवा

क बाट कछुवा

पढेर मान्छे आकाशगङ्गाका कण गन्ने भयो
तर पुरै कछुवाको "महत्त्व" कहिल्यै नबुझ्ने भयो

कछुवा,

नजिक हुदाहुदै दुर भयो

भईकन समिप आँखेको, अदृश्य भयो
साथी मान्छे कै हो तर मान्छे नै शत्रु भयो
र पो त धरापमा कछुवाको जीवन भयो
मित्री मासु त्याग कछुवाको खान सबैले लोभ गर्ने
मान्छेको "नमेटिने भोक"ले कछुवाको भोग गर्ने

मित्र प्रकृतिको हो यो असल कर्मचारी
पर्यावरण सन्तुलन कछुवाको काम छ जारी
संकटमा छ
शान्त, शिष्ट, सौम्य कछुवा
स्थिर, अडिग, धैर्यवान कछुवा
ढिलो नगरी संरक्षणमा अब जुटौं सारा मनुवा ।



आभास प्रधान

पेशा : विद्यार्थी

ठेगाना : हरिवन ११, सर्लाही

Email: pradhan.aavas004@gmail.com

www.arco-nepal.de
trcc.arco@gmail.com, arco.nepal@gmail.com



World Turtle Day

May 23, 2020



WORLD TURTLE DAY
May 23, 2020

Pragya Shrestha (pragyaatha0323@gmail.com)
Birtamode-4, Jhapa, Nepal

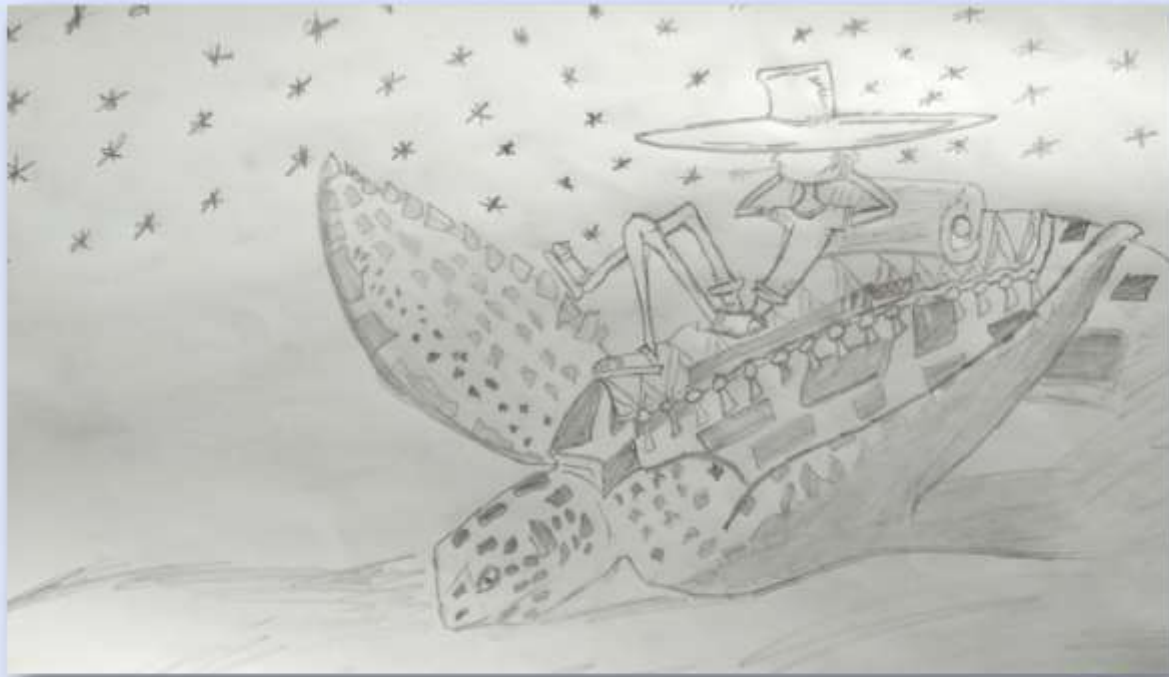
www.arco-nepal.de
trcc.arco@gmail.com, arco.nepal@gmail.com

World Turtle Day
May 23, 2020

Watercolor painting of Green sea turtle *Chelonia mydas*

Bijay Rai (tsuku7031@gmail.com)
Dharan, Sunsari
Completed B.Sc. in Microbiology from Central Campus of Technology, Dharan

www.arco-nepal.de
trcc.arco@gmail.com, arco.nepal@gmail.com



World Turtle Day

May 23, 2020

Kashup Khatri (khatrikashup123@gmail.com)
Chagunaryan, Bhaktapur, Nepal

www.arco-nepal.de

trcc.arco@gmail.com, arco.nepal@gmail.com



World Turtle Day

May 23, 2020



Somy Bhattarai (somybhattarai6501@gmail.com)
B.Sc. 4th Year (Environmental Science)
Mechi Multiple Campus, Bhadrapur, Jhapa

**Love Turtle, Save Turtle;
They are Ours, We are for Them!**

www.arco-nepal.de
trcc.arco@gmail.com, arco.nepal@gmail.com



World Turtle Day

May 23, 2020




Manjita Kharel (kharemanjita@gmail.com)
M.Sc. (Environmental) 1st Semester
Central Department of Environmental Science, Kirtipur





www.arco-nepal.de
trcc.arco@gmail.com; arco.nepal@gmail.com




Turtle grudge!!

Placidly and calmly
Step by step
Roaming the world
Better armour thyself
For strong prey on weak
And mercy is myth.

Look at our armour
Heavy? For sure it is.
But wanna survive this cruel world.
Be bold and hold
Cause human so called wisest
Will burn you with love.

Laziest and dumb,
They called us
Never truly understand
Our role and activity
Cornered us for death
Oh heaven, forever in agony.






Sajjan Regmi (regmisajjan1@gmail.com)
Institute of Forestry, Hetauda

On occasion of

World Turtle Day - May 23, 2020

"Save the Turtles"



www.arco-nepal.de
trcc.arco@gmail.com; arco.nepal@gmail.com

World Turtle Day

May 23, 2020



Pragati Khatiwada (khatiwadashiseer@gmail.com)
Dhajan, Jhapa



www.arco-nepal.de
trcc.arco@gmail.com, arco.nepal@gmail.com



कछुवा - महत्त्व र संरक्षण

धेरै वर्ष पहिले यसको महत्त्वलाई जानी
सृष्टि स्थिति यलाउनलाई आवश्यक पर्ने ठानी ।
द्वितीय अवतार प्रभु विष्णुको, कुर्म रूप धारण गरी
कछुवा भनी चिन्ची जसलाई आज, हामी संसार मरी ।

समुन्द्र, दुला नदी र सिमसार यसको वासस्थान
हुजारी हुजार जन्म भयो पछि यसका सन्तान ।
कोही जमिनमा कोही पानीमा बस्ने, प्रजाति भिन्न भिन्न
अदम्य प्राणी अरु भन्दा, खबटा नै यसको चिन्ह ।

समुन्द्रको पानी तिमी शुद्ध पनि गर्छौं
रोगी, सडै गलेका आहारा सतहबाट हर्छौं ।
उरुद्धो जीवशेष भनि फैलिएको छ तिमी नाम
समुन्द्रको खाद्य चक्र सन्तुलन राख्नु मुल तिमी काम ।

जलघर प्राणीहरुसँगै सहयात्रा गर्दै
पृथ्वीलाई सुन्दर पार्न सघी अगि सडौं ।
पारिस्थितिक प्रणाली सफल पार्ने कछुवाको काम
अनि कछुवा रक्षा गर्नु संसारको काम ।

प्लास्टिक प्रदूषणलाई हुटाउनु पर्छ
स्वस्थ वातावरणले आफै कछुवाको रक्षा गर्छ ।
यति राम्रो प्राणीको रक्षा हामीले गरौं
चेतना र ज्ञानको दिव्य बाल्न सबै अगि बढौं ।

पानी खराब भयो भने सबै जलघर माईन
सबै जलघर मरे भने मानव कष्टमा पर्छिन ।
जलघर, थलघर, अन्तरिक्ष सबको हित हुने
पर्यावरण सफल भए सबैको जीत हुने ।



Srijana Timilsina (srijanatimilsina237@gmail.com)
B.Sc. (Environmental) 3rd Year
Balkumari College, Bharatpur-10, Chitwan

World Turtle Day

May 23, 2020



www.arco-nepal.de
trcc.arco@gmail.com, arco.nepal@gmail.com



World Turtle Day

May 23, 2020



Things we have to learn from Turtles

- ☐ Swim with the current
- ☐ Be a good navigator
- ☐ Stay calm under pressure
- ☐ Be slow but don't give up
- ☐ Bless with longevity
- ☐ Age gracefully
- ☐ At ease in your own
- ☐ Travel at your own pace
- ☐ Be your self protector
- ☐ Spend time in nature





My happiness is my freedom and my freedom is plastic free ocean.



More the variety; Greater society; Save the biodiversity.



I'm the happiest when I crawl freely on the land.



Caring of forest means caring yourself

**Eat
Sleep
Love Turtle
And repeat**



Ganita Subba (ganitasubba7@gmail.com)
M.Sc. (Environmental) 1st Semester
Khowpa College, Bhaktapur

www.arco-nepal.de
trcc.arco@gmail.com; arco.nepal@gmail.com



"TURTLES ARE OUR FRIENDS, NOT PREY"

Some Turtles at Turtle Rescue and Conservation Centre-TRCC (ARCO-Nepal & SUMMEF)







Photos: (Above) *Cyclemys* sp., *Melanochelys tricarinata* and *Lissemys punctata*
(Left) *Pangshura tentoria flaviventer*

Ram Chandra Wagle (ramchandra980497@gmail.com)
M.Sc. 4th Semester
Post Graduate Campus
Biratnagar, Province – I, Nepal



World Turtle Day

May 23, 2020

www.arco-nepal.de trcc.arco@gmail.com; arco.nepal@gmail.com



Let's shellebrate and free the nets of threats

Every year, 23 May is celebrated as World Turtle Day (WTD). It is celebrated not only to show respect and compassion to these animals but also to make human aware about their life-threatening struggle for the existence. On this occasion, WTD voice for the conservation of turtles. Turtles are also famously cited as ancient animals which shared their history with the dinosaurs in past.



Even though, turtles are characterized as animals with hard shells on their back, there are some aquatic turtles that have leathery skin and are called softshells. Typically, turtles are characterized as slow-moving and long-lived animals. But in contrary, some aquatic turtle like e.g. *Pangshura* species, softshells and marine turtles are very fast, and generally live for 20- over 50 years. However, tortoise live entirely on land and can live comparatively longer; some more than over hundred years.

Turtles are ecologically important, for instance, Gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) is best known as environment engineers as they dig holes. When they leave those holes, it will be used by others animals. Also, tortoises eat fallen fruits and defecate semi-digested food to new places and helps in seed dispersal. Similarly, softshells cleans the wetlands by scavenging on dead and decayed animals. Turtles are totally harmless when left undisturbed but some large softshells have very strong bite and can cause severe wound when mishandled. Though harmless in nature, turtles are one of the most endangered vertebrates in the world along with primates.

While the majority of turtle species are threatened, mainly due to hunting and smuggling for its meat, shells, eggs, hatchlings and as pets in illegal wildlife trade, and occasionally as bycatch in commercial fishing and along that habitat loss (e.g., human settlement, dam construction etc.), plastic pollution (microplastics are mistaken as food and ingested by turtles which damages their digestive systems and results in painful deaths) and climate change (e.g., sea level rise due to melting of polar ice impacts its nesting habitats at the beaches) etc. further worsens their threatened status.

In addition to it, many get entangled at the abandoned fish nets, notoriously known as “ghost nets”. As well thousands of turtle eggs and hatchlings are smuggled away from wild every year which additionally gravitate them towards the harrowing odds of extinction. Because of these reasons their population

declines rapidly before they get chance to revive and impact their healthy populations. Similarly, mating failures due to less fertile populations may result in unviable eggs avoiding further their chances of survival.

Unfortunately, Yangtze giant softshell turtle (*Rafetus swinhoei*) faced similar tragedy when its last known female died in 2019. As one of the world's rarest turtle, this species stands on the slightest edge away from extinction as leaving only three individuals in the whole world. Scientists claim the intensity of threats to Yangtze giant softshell were unsustainable hunting for meat, habitat loss due to the building of dams and unsuccessful mating resulting unviable eggs. Similarly, last male species of Pinta Island tortoise (*Chelonoidis abingdonii*) died leaving its species as “functionally extinct” in 2012. The above cases clearly illustrate the bleak situation of turtles all around the world.

And, turtles of Nepal are not an outsider to this brutal scenario. They are hunted and consumed for its meat by local communities and these are often believed to bring good luck and prosperity for any business or at home.

Though, many species of turtles found in Nepal are categorized as threatened by IUCN and are also listed in CITES, sadly they are not yet protected species in Nepal. Kästle et al. (2013) and Turtle Taxonomy Working Group (2017) mentions 16 species of turtles with 18 taxa for Nepal. However, there aren't proven records of *Geoclemys hamiltonii*, *Morenia petersi* or *Batagur* in Nepal.

Turtles are one of the least researched fauna elements in Nepal and thus, there lacks the knowledge about their present status, distribution, biology, threats, etc. Nevertheless, it can't be generalized as if there have never been any works or efforts done regarding these vertebrates. Since, many notable works are not publicized well, where renowned herpetologist Prof. Dr. Hermann Schleich from Germany has relentlessly contributed in the herpetofauna researches in Nepal for more than three decades. Likewise, Prof. Dr. Kalu Ram Rai 'Khambu' from Jhapa, Eastern Nepal is another iconic personality in the field of herpetofauna, especially about turtles who publicize them through his researches, conservation works and teaching.

And without talking about the works done by Amphibians and Reptile Conservation of Nepal (ARCO-Nepal) will not be justified while talking about turtle conservation in Nepal. ARCO-Nepal assisted in the establishment of Turtle Conservation Program in 2000 at Chitwan National Park. It is also the first turtle conservation and breeding project in Nepal. ARCO-Nepal has been working for many years relentlessly on conservation of turtles like rescuing, rearing, breeding, etc. along with disseminating awareness about turtles to local communities. Similarly, Turtle Rescue and Conservation Centre (TRCC) at Sukhani Martyrs Memorial Foundation (SUMMEF) Park Jhapa was established in 2012 with the assistance of ARCO-Nepal. In brief, TRCC is a “turtle-sanctuary” which has all the necessary infrastructures like quarantine section, caged breeding center, terrestrial enclosures, rearing ponds, laboratory with necessary equipment and well-fenced natural wetlands for softshells. Currently the TRCC accommodates species like Tricarinate hill turtle, Indian peacock softshell turtle, Indian flapshell turtle, Elongated tortoise, Asian Leaf turtle, etc.

In the plethora of these serious persisting threats which have potential to severely impact their numbers, their future doesn't seem hopeful. But if viewed with an optimistic vision, actually many things can be done. Many human interventions can be carried out, like protection of wetlands and forests, discouraging turtles as pets, promoting effective conservation activities and conducting extensive awareness program. Along this proper inaction of stringent laws and enforcement is more likely to discourage illegal trade of turtles where strict monitoring and regulation of its trade is imperative.

Let's conserve one of the most threatened vertebrate i.e. turtles, value their historical existence and educate people about their conservation.

Sabitri Rai (sabitrirai4env@gmail.com) & Tapil P Rai

VOLUNTARIADOS EN ALMERIA/SPAIN Y EN NEPAL

**ARCO-Instituto y Nucleo Zoológico @ Tabernas / Almería
Centro de Acogida de Tortugas y otros Animales Exóticos
Interesado?**

www.arco-spain.org & www.arco-nepal.de

Mail: arco.spain05@gmail.com



VOLUNTEERING AT TURTLE RESCUE & CONSERVATION CENTRES

**We are running a rescue centre for rehoming and breeding
endangered turtle species in SE-Nepal and S-Spain.
Interested?**

www.arco-spain.org & www.arco-nepal.de

Mail: arco.spain05@gmail.com

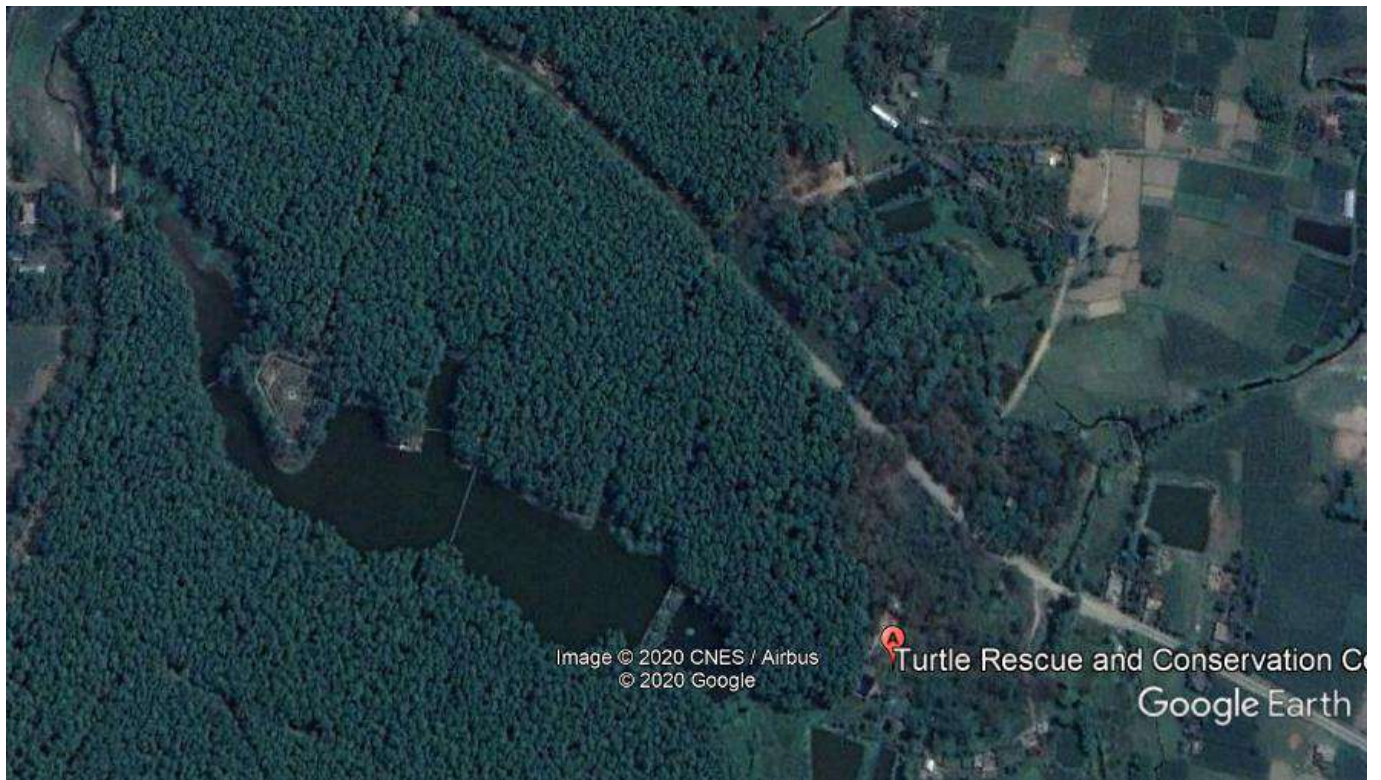
VOLONTARIAT IN ARTENSCHUTZSTATION

**ARCO- Auffang- und Arterhaltungszentrum für Schildkröten
in Südspanien (Tabernas/Almeria) und SE-Nepal (Jhapa)
Interesse?**

www.arco-spain.org & www.arco-nepal.de

Mail: arco.spain05@gmail.com





SUMMEF Park and below TURTLE RESCUE & CONSERVATION CENTRE at Shani Arjun, Nepal.
Photo credit by Google Earth Pro, 2020

