



Asian Turtle News

News from the Frontlines of Conservation

The Asian Turtle Conservation Network (ATCN)

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One of the worlds rarest turtles rescued in Vietnam.

On Wednesday the 26th of November 2008 a local fisherman from Son Tram Commune, Son Tay district, Ha Noi (previously Ha Tay province) caught a large soft-shell turtle weighing 69kg and measuring 90cm in length. The giant soft-shell turtle was identified as a Swinhoe's soft-shell turtle (*Rafetus swinhoei*), for which only four living examples are known to remain in the world. Two of the surviving turtles are in a Chinese zoo, another in Hoan Kiem Lake in the center of Hanoi, and the last wild example of the species occupies Dong Mo Lake in Son Tay district of Hanoi.

Since the beginning of 2007, a conservation team from Cleveland Metroparks Zoo's Asian Turtle Program (ATP) and Education for Nature Vietnam (ENV) have been working at the lake complex and within surrounding communities to conserve the species after the turtle was confirmed in the lake in late 2006.

The turtle caught by fishermen apparently escaped from the lake when a dam broke during flooding on the 1st of November. A net was then placed across the flooded stream about 4 km below the broken dam to contain the turtle and prevent it from reaching the Red River, where it would be lost. The turtle was caught by fishermen during the early hours of November 26th in the containment area.

Following news of the capture, the Forest Protection Department (FPD) arrived quickly at the scene, already aware of the importance of the species and alerted about its escape from the lake. Six hours of negotiations then followed involving rangers, police, and government officials before the fisherman agreed to release turn over the turtle to authorities. Staff from Cleveland Zoo, ENV, and a team from the Turtle Conservation Centre (TCC) at Cuc Phuong National Park transported the animal back to the lake where the turtle was released.

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www.asianturtlenetwork.org



Rafetus swinhoei, the turtle appeared to be in good health despite its ordeal

Photo by: Tim McCormack – Asian Turtle Program



At 90cm long the *Rafetus swinhoei* can grow to be the largest freshwater turtle found in Asia.

Photo by: Tim McCormack – Asian Turtle Program