

WCS/TSA Partnership Provides Renewed Hope for *Batagur* in Indochina

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The Sre Ambel project is working to conserve Indochina's last known population of the Critically Endangered River Terrapin, or Batagur (*Batagur affinis*), in the Sre Ambel and Kaong rivers of southwestern Cambodia. The project activities are designed to protect wild populations of the Batagur, through guarding nesting beaches and implementing law enforcement patrols in the two rivers, as well as rearing a captive population in a conservation hatchling center. This program is administered by the Wildlife Conservation Society's (WCS) Cambodia program, with

technical and financial support provided by the TSA.

The hatchling center focuses on rearing turtles to a size where the likelihood of mortality is lowered, and it has received significant support from the TSA since its construction in 2006. Hatchlings are raised from eggs collected on nesting beaches by the patrol staff, and these are grouped in a number of tanks according to age and size class. Support from the TSA in 2009

funded infrastructure improvements at the hatchling center, including improved water and electricity supply and the construction of an additional kitchen building. The water supply was improved with the construction of a new and deeper well, and the installation of a solar pump and water tank. The water tank has a capacity of 3,000 liters, and has been installed on a tower that allows the water to flow freely through a system of pipes above the holding tanks. Water flows into the tanks continuously, with overflow pipes allowing excess water to drain from the tanks. The solar pump is powered by two 87 watt solar panels, and the well has been dug to a depth of 12 meters to ensure that water is available throughout the year, including during the dry season.

Further improvements to the hatchling center, however, will soon be necessary, as the population of animals continues to increase. Two



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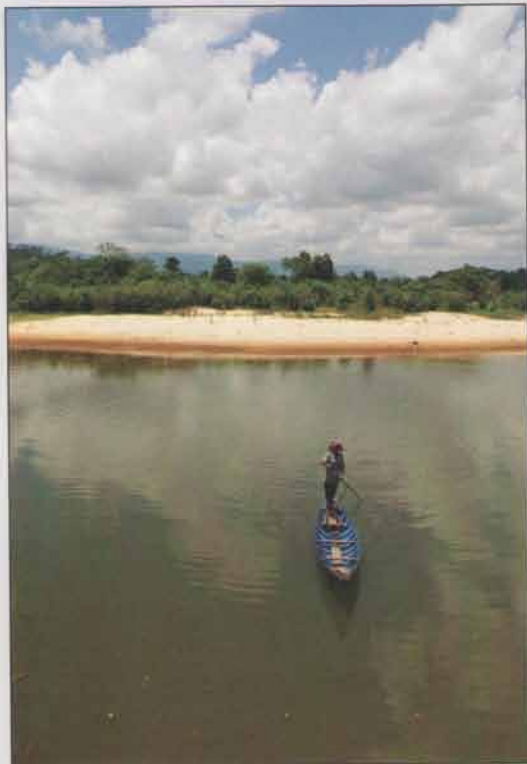
Far left: New water tanks at the Sre Ambel Hatchling Center. **Left:** Hatchlings at the center, from the 2010 nesting season. **Bottom:** Two additional holding tanks installed at the center.



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Left: The nesting beach on the Sre Ambel River is guarded 24 hours per day during the nesting and hatching seasons. Pictured here is the guard coming to shore to transport biologists to the nesting beach. **Middle:** New solar panels will serve to power pumps for moving water from the well to water storage tanks, where the water will be gravity fed into the headstarting facility. **Right:** Three wild caught River Terrapins (*Batagur affinis*), some of the last of their kind in Indochina, held in captivity for over 10 years at a facility in Koh Kong. These turtles represent valuable genetic additions to the captive program. Major improvements at the Sre Ambel facility are required before these turtles can be moved.

nests were located and protected by project rangers during the 2010 nesting season; one nest contained a total of 11 eggs, of which 10 individuals hatched in early May, and the second a total of five eggs, although only one individual hatched, in early June. Thus, there are 11 new arrivals at the center, in addition to the 118 animals that were already held (47 hatchlings from 2006, 47 hatchlings from 2007, one animal estimated at four years of age captured by a fisherman and handed to the conservation team in early 2008, and 23 hatchlings from 2009). Two new plastic tanks have been purchased to increase the capacity of the center in the short term, but a new and larger facility will likely have to be constructed over the next 12 to 18 months, if a suitable site can be located in the vicinity of the Sre Ambel River.

This program represents another outstanding example of the WCS/



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Protecting a *Batagur* nest on the Sre Ambel River, the only known nesting site for this species in Cambodia, through the use of chicken wire. Ten turtles hatched from this nest in 2010.

TSA partnership that is working throughout Southeast Asia to protect populations of Critically Endangered chelonians. Additional financial support has been provided by the Turtle Conservation Fund and the Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund.

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