Recent concerns raised about the health of the Hoan Kiem Turtle in Hanoi’s famous lake.

The Hoan Kiem Turtle in Hanoi’s central Hoan Kiem Lake is famous in Vietnam due to the 16th century legend that relates to this species. Known as Swinhoe’s Softshell Turtle (Rafetus swinhoei) the species is critically endangered due to a combination of habitat loss and illegal hunting and trade. A single large animal now remains in the Hanoi lake but appears to be suffering with some injuries to its shell. A number of newspapers have reported this was caused by the invasive Red Eared Slider Turtle (Trachemys scripta elegans) attacking the turtle although this is unlikely. The concern is now that the animal might be sick and need treatment but with such a large and endangered animals there are of course risks to capturing and handling it for treatment.

The ATP has recommended the turtle is left in place and monitored for unusual behaviour such as basking on cold days for any visible determination in the wound on the carapace. If the animal is moved for treatment international experts such as the team who moved the Chinese animals should be contacted and involved if possible and necessary planning and holding facility prepared but regardless could pose a risk to the animal.

Photos of injuries to the Hoan Kiem Turtle from 30th December 2010, From VNExpress website http://vnexpress.net/GL/Xa-hoi/2010/12/3BA24DDB/

The injury on the neck appear to be old and heeled, apparently it occurred 10 around 10 years ago.
The more recent injury to the front of the carapace are from unknown causes but are being largely blamed by the media on red eared sliders.

During 2010 the Rafetus swinhoei in Hoan Kiem has suffered a number of injuries recorded in the press. On the 6th September 2010 the turtle in Hoan Kiem lake was seen with a fishing hook in the carapace. Repeated calls have been made from conservationist, including the ATP to improve security at the lake to stop harmful fishing methods and littering.

Photos from Tien Phong online:

Photos from 23rd November 2010, Rafetus swinhoei in Hoan Kiem lake seen with rubber in its mouth.
Photos from VNExpress  http://vnexpress.net/GL/Xa-hoi/2010/11/3BA234BD/