

### SITE VISIT

## Sang Poh Tong Temple

**Date:** April 17, 2004

**Location:** Perak State, Malaysia

### Overview:

The Sang Poh Tong temple is located 10k northeast of the city of Ipoh. The temple consists of several large structures and a temple pond located outside the entrance of a cave entrance that leads visitors through a series of caverns and religious shrines before exiting into a large natural open-air courtyard surrounded on all four sides by steep cavern walls. Within this courtyard is a large palace-like temple structure and a smaller temple pond with a secure fence around it. Within the pond are perhaps several hundred (100+ counted) turtles representing six or possibly seven species. These include the following listed below:

### Major Activities

Species	Total	Notes
<i>Cuora amboinensis</i>	40+	
<i>Heosemys grandis</i>	20+	
<i>Siebenrockiella crassicollis</i>	1	
<i>Orlitia borneensis</i>	5+	Very large individuals
<i>Manouria emys</i>	3+	One individual dead/near dead
<i>Trachemys scripta</i>	50+	
<i>Hieremys annandalii</i>	1 (?)	Possible sighting

### Facilities Description

The temple pond consists of a small pond measuring no more than 4X6 meters, and an adjacent land area and roofed shelter. The turtles were congregated mainly in the pool area under severe crowding conditions. Although no staff of the temple were available to discuss management of the turtles maintained in the temple, it was apparent that the conditions were extremely poor for most of the species maintained there, and that water quality, health issues, and the impossibility of so many turtles being properly fed and maintained in such a small area contribute to a relatively high turnover. Moreover, a pile of shell fragments, bones, and several skulls were observed adjacent to the enclosure.

### Recommendations

The issue for the turtles at the Sang Poh Tong center is mainly a welfare issue, as only two species present, *Orlitia borneensis* and *Manouria emys*, could be considered priorities in terms of the potential benefit of placing the animals in conservation-focused assurance colonies.

However, contact should be made with the management of the temple to discuss how to deal with the numbers of turtles that Buddhists bring to the temple to release. One possibility is that turtles of specific species such as *Orlitia borneensis* and *Manouria emys* (or *Batagur baska*) be transferred into captive programs managed by zoos or other qualified institutions. Efforts might focus on three initial steps:

- (1) Provide very basic awareness training for the staff and Buddhist monks working in the temple complex so that they understand the need to conserve Malaysia's turtles, and how they can play a part. It is suggested that the standard "Asian turtle crisis" training module be used followed by roundtable discussions about how the monks and staff of the center can help protect turtles.
- (2) Provide the staff with visual resources so that they can identify rare species that are released at the temple, and maintain some basic records of animals coming in.
- (3) Provide contact information for Zoo Negara or another designated location that could be called if the staff have questions or wish to report the release of a priority species at the site.
- (4) Secure an agreement/arrangement through which priority species would be removed from the temple and placed in appropriate facilities.



The Sang Poh Tong Temple  
in Malaysia



The overcrowded pond at  
the temple

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