

The ShellShock campaign may be over, but turtle – tortoise activities still last

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Where? What? How? What to do if turtle is found? The leaflet 'Looking for the pond turtle in Latvia' contains answers to all these questions.



The 2005 Shellshock campaign inspired a succession of events involving turtles and tortoises at Riga Zoo:

1. The zoo calendar for 2005 was devoted to the Shellshock campaign and contained information on the conservation of reptiles.
2. Our educational activities were focused both on the global situation and on actual national problems.
3. The first two weeks of the traditional 'Tropical Month' in February were dedicated to turtles. Visitors got acquainted with the endangered turtles exhibited at the Tropical House.
4. On The Tortoise Path, visitors found information on the main threats to reptiles, and they could compare tortoises with turtles. Ten Asian Leaf turtles (*Cyclemys dentata*) and five Malayan Flat-shelled turtles (*Notochelys platynota*) confiscated by Hong Kong customs received refuge at Riga Zoo in January, and were live witnesses of the illegal trade. Other illegal trade subjects such as souvenirs – like haberdashery and shells – were also exhibited at the Tropical House. Informative panels were made and are still on display at the entrance to the Tropical House.
5. On June 5th, Earth Day, educational information on endangered turtle and tortoise species – in combination with fun activities – were continued. Some two hundred visitors took part in the 'Turtle - Tortoise

Trail'. An important message of the trail was the unwanted pet turtle problem. As in many other European countries, young Red-eared sliders (*Trachemys scripta elegans*) have become popular pets in Latvia. However, as adults, the sliders overflow zoos (twenty six unwanted specimens were 'donated' to Riga Zoo in 2005) or are dumped in lakes and rivers.

6. In June, during Riga Zoo's annual public weighing show of the Indefatigable Island tortoises (*Geochelone nigra porter*), leaflets containing information about the critical situation of turtles and tortoises in the wild were distributed among the public. Riga Zoo encouraged visitors to refrain from eating turtle soup and buying illegal souvenirs made from turtles during their travels abroad.
7. During the summer, a new project on native wildlife was developed in cooperation with Daugavpils Zoo. The essence of this project is the compilation of data on an endangered Latvian species, the European pond turtle (*Emys orbicularis*). Summarised facts on pond turtle biology and habits, as well as tips for observing and recognizing this cautious animal, were shared in a leaflet. Supplemented with a post card size questionnaire, the leaflet was distributed in schools and at nature conservation centres. Reliable information has already been received from several parts of Latvia. ♦

Confiscated turtle and tortoise shells – witnesses of the illegal animal trade – were on exhibition during the annual Tropical Month.

