

The project "Conservation of the Mediterranean Tortoise on the Black Sea Coast of the Caucasus, Russian Federation – Evaluation, Education and Population Augmentation" by support of The Rufford Maurice Laing Foundation (Rufford Small Grant for Nature Conservation (RSG)) in 2006

This project is focused on a consolidation of efforts of specialists - herpetologists, official conservation organizations, and the general public for the conservation of the Mediterranean tortoise (*Testudo graeca*), which is included in the IUCN/SSC (VU A1cd) and Russian Federation Red list of protected species, and Appendix II of CITES.

Subspecies *Testudo graeca nikolskii* is living at the west Caucasus (Krasnodar area, RF and Abkhazia Republic). Nowadays its area is reduced and divided into some genetically isolated populations. So, the main tasks of the project:

- An estimation of distribution and number of *Testudo graeca nikolskii* at the west Caucasus;
- Prevention of illegal collecting and trade of turtles (in contact with the State structures for Nature Conservation)
- Collection of turtles, which were caught in the territory of Russia, from their owners and returning them to the wild;
- Choice the place and partners for creation of the center of rehabilitation for this species at the west Caucasus;
- Making of conditions for wide public support of the project (publications, TV- and radio-plots, competitions for children and so on).

Main results of our activity in 2006:

1. At the begining of our activity we have received some consultations and the letter of support from the Ministry of Nature Resourses Russian Federation (**App.1**).
2. We have found the consource of the financing for realization our project. This is support The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW).
3. Abkhazia Republic was included to the geography of the project. We had a meeting with the leader of the Republic Department of Nature Conservation and the head of State University in Sukhumi; an agreement about investigation and protection of Greek tortoise in the republic was achieved (**App. 2**).
4. We organised questioning of specialists of forestry and agriculture, hunters, and inhibitions in Krasnodar area and Abkhazia Republic (**App. 3**). The main results of this questioning and our two-mounthes expedition are new data about distribution of *Testudo graeca nikolskii* in the north and south bordies of its area. Nearly 40 Mediterranean tortoises were targed during the expedition.
5. At the beginning and at the end of 2006 we organised work groups with the representatives of federal and regional structures of Nature Conservation, not-governmental and scientific organisations from St. Petersburg, Moscow, Nijny Novgorod, Krasnodar and Adygeya Republic. The problems of investigation and protection of Mediterranean tortoise were discussed an agreement about cooperation was achieved (**App. 4**).
6. We have registered some decline of illegal trade of Mediterranean tortoises in Moscow, St. Petersburg and Krasnodar area. Perhaps it connects with number lowering of this species (especially of young ones). We have withdrawn from illegal trade 1 young tortoise in shop of the Sochy city.

7. We collected from owners and return to the wild 9 Greek tortoises on the territories of private “Safari-park” (near Gelendjik) and Caucasus State Reservation (near Sochi). We achieved an agreement about creation of the center of rehabilitation for Mediterranean tortoises on the base of this reservation (**App. 5**).
8. We prepared, printed and distributed colour posters and calendars with an original photo of protected tortoises and logo of our sponsors (**App. 6, 7**)
9. With the participation of the Department of Control of the Nature Use, the Department of Ecological Education of Krasnodar area we organised a competition “Attention, a turtle!” For pupils and students. We received nearly 600 projects; winners and participations of the competition received some prizes (partially, calendars and posters with logo of **RSG**) (**App.8**).
10. We prepared more than 10 newspaper publications, TV- and radio-plots about the project in 4 areas of Russia and in Abkhazia Republic. An articles about the project were published in “NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC for Youth”, 2006, № 5; “Protection of Wild Nature”, 2006, № 1 and “Nauka i zhizn”, 2006, № 12 (**App. 9**).
11. The main results of the project were presented as the report on the symposium of Russian Herpetological Society (October 2006, Puschino, Moscow area) and included to the resolution of the symposium.

So, we believed that the results of our activity in 2006 were successful and hope to continue the realisation of this project at following years

We are glad to express many thanks to The Rufford Maurice Laing Foundation (Rufford Small Grant for Nature Conservation) for financial support of the project. Let us hope to the future cooperation!

The head of the project

Dr. Mark Pestov