



## Bernard Devaux Receives the 5th Annual 2010 Behler Turtle Conservation Award

The IUCN/SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group and the Turtle Survival Alliance are pleased to announce that the 2010 Behler Turtle Conservation Award will be presented to Bernard Devaux from SOPTOM, Gonfaron, France.

Bernard is a leading turtle conservationist whose work in France and around the world has been inspirational for many, as he has created a series of educational “turtle villages” around the world and worked tirelessly for the conservation of wild populations of turtles and tortoises. He is essentially a self-taught naturalist, as well as a traveler, writer, and film director. He believes that a new way of thinking is needed to better protect the world’s turtles and tortoises, by disseminating information and raising awareness among children and the general public, starting with the premise that tortoises are not creatures to be kept in a garden or an aquarium, they are not toys for children to play with, nor are they trophies for collectors — they are wild animals that should be protected in their natural habitats.

In 1986, Bernard created the SOPTOM association (*Station d’Observation et de Protection des Tortues et de leurs Milieux*; Station for the Observation and Protection of Turtles and their Habitats) in order

to study and protect the Hermann’s Tortoise (*Testudo hermanni*). He then created the *Village des Tortues* (Turtle Village) in Gonfaron in southern France in 1988, with the idea to finance conservation by opening a visitor center that was not only scientific but also accessible to the public. Spurred on by the success of the concept, he opened the first Turtle Clinic in Europe (1989) followed by other Turtle Villages in Corsica (at Moltifao in 1992), Senegal (at Noflaye in 1995), and Madagascar (at Ifaty in 2003).

Through making films about reptiles, as well as holding conferences and meeting other tortoise and nature enthusiasts such as David Stubbs, Ian Swingland, Gerald and Lee Durrell, and Peter Pritchard, Bernard became a fierce protector of Europe’s tortoises, then of tortoises in other French-speaking countries, and finally all over the world. He uses a variety of media in France and abroad (television, radio and films, as well as specialized and general press) to raise as much public awareness as possible regarding the fate of our planet’s turtles and tortoises. He has written over 10 books on tortoises, both specialized and generalized, as well as an *Encyclopedia of Turtles of the World* (1996), in four languages, in conjunction with two other naturalist photographers, Alain Dupré and Franck Bonin. He is a specialist on the African Tortoise, *Centrochelys sulcata*, and the Aldabra Tortoise, *Dipsochelys dussumieri* (= *Aldabrachelys gigantea*), and wrote two monographs in French and English on these species in 2000 and

2007. A bilingual monograph on the Madagascan Tortoise (*Astrochelys radiata*) is about to be published, a species that he studies and protects on the south of the island.

Bernard is a great believer in globalizing conservation. By developing a worldwide network of specialists, enthusiasts, and those who work tirelessly to protect turtles, we can combat trafficking, collecting, and the removal of turtles and tortoises from their natural habitats. With this aim, he has organized and sponsored several international chelonian conferences and symposia on conservation (1995 in Gonfaron and 2003 in Senegal), pathology (1992), the European turtle *Emys orbicularis* (1999), and the paleartic tortoises of the genus *Testudo* (2002). In October 2010, he will co-sponsor the fifth European Symposium on *Emys orbicularis* (in conjunction with the Swiss association, P.R.T.).

To encourage the creation of a worldwide chelonian conservation network, he visits and assists centers and programs around the world (Australia, China, Costa Rica, Italy, Malaysia, Spain, and South Africa) and keeps specialists informed via his *La Tortue* magazine, which is distributed in 25 countries (three issues a year, in French but with a small English supplement). He firmly believes that globalizing skills and consciences is the only way (thanks to the internet, and powerful organizations such as the IUCN, CI, WWF, and TSA) to act quickly in order to prevent major turtle and tortoise sites from being destroyed, such as in Aldabra in 2005 and in the Mary River in eastern Australia in 2009.

His ambition is to put an end to the turtle and tortoise trade, and to see every country restore its territory’s biotopes and

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chelonian populations. He also hopes that other information and conservation centers similar to the Turtle Villages will be opened in several countries, encouraging the desire to protect local chelonian populations efficiently. In addition, he hopes that young herpetologists, environmentalists, and biologists will fiercely devote themselves to much-needed chelonian conservation on our planet. He often reminds us (as P. Pritchard and J. Behler said): *tortoises have been on our planet for 230 million years, but we have a responsibility now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to make sure they do not disappear!*

The IUCN/SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group and Turtle Survival Alliance established the Behler Turtle Conservation Award in 2006, a major annual award presented jointly by these groups to honor leadership and excellence in the field of tortoise and freshwater turtle conservation. The award honors the memory of John L. Behler, previous Chair of the Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group and Curator of Herpetology at the Bronx Zoo, Wildlife Conservation Society. The Award includes an honorarium of \$3,000, and co-sponsors this year are Chelonian Research Foundation, Conservation International, Chelonian Research Institute, Behler Chelonian Center, World Chelonian Trust, Wildlife Conservation Society, Deborah Behler, and Brett and Nancy Stearns.

Previous Behler Award honorees have been Ed Moll, Whit Gibbons, Peter Pritchard, and Gerald Kuchling. In addition to honoring the lifetime achievements of senior turtle and tortoise conservationists, the Award also honors conservation efforts by younger individuals who make major contributions to the field. Recognizing and valuing the



Bernard Devaux with a Radiated Tortoise (*Astrochelys radiata*).

often tireless and dedicated efforts made by all these individuals is important, and the Behler Award hopes to provide some inspiration and reward for those who have demonstrated excellence and leadership on the front lines of global turtle conservation efforts.