Special Issue

Novel Insights in the Biology and Conservation of Freshwater Turtles

Message from the Guest Editors

Freshwater turtles are among the most ancient vertebrates on Earth. As for other chelonians, their body plan persisted with little change for more than 200 million years and their distribution spans across rivers of all continents, from equatorial up to temperate biomes. Nearly one third of all chelonians (353 spp.) is represented by taxa with a distinct adaptation to freshwater habitats. Hunting for turtle egg and meat, accompanied by the poor status of the world's rivers and wetlands, habitat destruction, and climate change, imply that freshwater turtles are the most threatened vertebrates on Earth; a majority is classified as threatened, and a significant but poorly assessed number of species, starting from Asiatic taxa, are at the brink of extinction. Recent decades have witnessed significant advancements in the understanding of turtle distribution, ecology and conservation status. Yet wide gaps persist. Next to this, recent advancements have enhanced our knowledge on fascinating aspects of the physiology of these weird organisms, including their ontogeny, breathing, reproduction and senescence (or rather lack thereof).

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