



The Wildlife Watch Binocular

PO Box 562, New Paltz, NY 12561

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Saving the Turtles of Northeast India

By Bindu Gopal Rao

It's my pleasure to let you know about **Professor H.T. Lalremsanga** who heads the Department of Zoology at Mizoram University. Prof. Lalremsanga has been working tirelessly to conserve softshell turtles.

Freshwater turtles are facing a rapid decline in numbers due to habitat loss, climate change, the pet trade, their meat, and use in traditional medicines. Conservation then is not just the need of the hour but a long-term, community-based approach, that requires the help of local youth, researchers, and forest staff.

Professor H.T. Lalremsanga



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PHOTO © THE WILDCAT SANCTUARY

SHAZAM, THE LAST LIVING MEMBER OF THE CATSKILL GAME FARM BIG CATS

Periodically, **Wildlife Watch** checks in with **The Wildcat Sanctuary** to see how our remaining big cats are. The rescue that Wildlife Watch initiated in 2006 can be seen at the links at the end of this article, along with their lives and their gentle passing at the wonderful Wildcat Sanctuary that gave them a second chance at life. **Shazam is now the last remaining cat of the Big Seven.**

For a brief history: The black leopard was one of the seven large cats that Wildlife Watch arranged to be transported over the Christmas holiday from the Catskill Game Farm in Catskill, NY to The Wildcat Sanctuary in Sandstone, MN. His zookeeper alerted Wildlife Watch to the plight of the big cats who were still left at the Catskill Game Farm after the auction of hundreds of animals had ended. Her concern was that they could end up in a canned hunting operation. She told us the sad story of the black leopard and expressed her deep concern about his future. She explained that he had a longtime mate while there, and they were inseparable.

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TURTLE TALK

Lalremsanga's team started their research on the turtles and tortoises of Mizoram, a state in northeast India, in 2010. The Asian Brown Tortoise (*Manouria emys*) was their first initiation into the world of turtles. Prof. Lalremsanga explains, "Our first scientific papers specifically on Softshell turtles was published on May 21, 2020. It was about the geographic distribution of *Amyda* species – (softshell turtles) and their need for conservation. **Our work included the ecology, distribution, DNA barcoding, conservation, and legal awareness within the state, and the need for conservation of the species, not only for the softshell turtles but for all turtles.**" In the remote areas of Mizoram where tradition rules, people are still bound by old practices and hunting wild animals is still part of the daily life of the people in these areas. Hunting softshell turtles for both food and money is quite common as most people are unaware of the legal impact or the need for conservation of the species. Each adult softshell turtle weighs around 3 to 4 kilograms which is worth anywhere between Rs. 1250 and Rs. 1700 (between about \$15 and \$20).

HABITAT LOSS

Softshell turtles are mostly found in major drainages and rivers of the state, and in some fishponds in the plains areas. **One of the other reasons for the dwindling numbers is also loss of habitat due to deforestation, construction**

of dams for hydro-electric power, use of dynamo for catching fish, poisoning of streams, rivers, or drainages, dumping of waste near water bodies and the shortage of legal awareness programs. Deforestation in the state is mainly due to agricultural practices like Jhum cultivation (slash and burn), collection of timber, main and link road construction which is also causing climate change and water scarcity. "Uses of dynamos, bombs, and poisoning of water bodies hugely affects softshell turtles and the aquatic environment. The softshell turtles are mostly found in major drainages and rivers of the state, and in some fishponds in the plains areas. **Prof. Lalremsanga urges spreading awareness among the local people who play a vital role in the conservation of these valuable species.**"

MAPPING TO HELP

There is little information about softshell turtles in and around northeastern India. Recently, a new subspecies, *Amyda ornata jongli* was discovered from specimens based on Assam, Mizoram, Tripura, and Bangladesh in 2022. Later it was reported from the state of Manipur. Other species like the Black softshell turtle (*Nilssonina nigricans*) is listed as Endangered, while the Indian peacock softshell turtle (*Nilssonina hurum*) and the Indian flapshell turtle (*Lissemys punctata*) are listed as Vulnerable under the IUCN criteria. [Founded in 1948, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has become the global authority on the status of the natural world.] The surveying of different habitats including water bodies, wetlands, drainages, paddy fields and the like to know the distribution and population of the species is being done by his

Hunting softshell turtles for both food and money is quite common as most people are unaware of the legal impact or the need for conservation of the species.



Black softshell turtle listed as endangered

SHAZAM, THE LAST LIVING MEMBER OF THE CATSKILL GAME FARM BIG CATS

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PHOTO © KForce at en.wikipedia



PHOTO © WILDCATSANCTUARY.ORG

One day, a log platform in their enclosure came loose and Shazam's soulmate was killed. He became unmanageable and inconsolable after that.

SHAZAM'S NEW LIFE AT THE WILDCAT SANCTUARY

By Tammy Theis, Founder and Executive Director of The Wildcat Sanctuary

Even after all these years, the Catskill Game Farm closure still has an impact on our sanctuary. Sadly, we said goodbye in 2021 to our lioness Shanti Deva. She truly was the queen of our sanctuary. But she lives on in the hearts of thousands all over the world who knew and loved her.

Our last cat from the Catskill rescue, leopard Shazam, is now 21 years old and one of our oldest residents. Our sanctuary has a special comfort care program for our geriatric cats. To us, their final years are just as important as their younger, more active years.

Shazam receives medication for pain management since arthritis is so common in all our elder cats. And we provide him with appropriate enrichment for his stage of life.

He still enjoys his toys, even a mirror ball he can admire himself in! Plus, he has his very own television so he can be engaged with nature shows when he chooses to hang out in his indoor bedroom. He's no different than the rest of us, enjoying some down time to TV!

Though he isn't living with another wild cat, he's able to enjoy companionship in a special way. He likes his next-door neighbors so we've cut a hole in the wall between their habitats so he can say "howdy" to them whenever he wants. That's why we call it a howdy door.

Of course, most of his time is spent outdoors where he can play with them along their shared wall, too. He enjoys all the seasons here.

We cherish our time with Shazam, knowing his eventual

passing will be the end of an era for all of us. And we're so grateful Wildlife Watch interceded to give all these cats the wild at heart lives they deserved.

It is a joy to see how happy he became at the Wildcat Sanctuary. See this wonderful video of Shazam made by The Wildcat Sanctuary, [youtube.com/watch?v=4_fpQMQPd58](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_fpQMQPd58)

To learn more about the Wildcat Sanctuary, please visit: wildcatsanctuary.org



Wildlife Watch Following Up On the Cats Over the Years

Wildlife Watch followed up on the cats in the links below:

wildwatch.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Fall_2007.pdf

wildwatch.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Spring_2008.pdf

wildwatch.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Winter_2013_Issue.pdf

wildwatch.org/fall_2016/follow-wildlife-watch-rescue-catskill-game-farm-cats/

wildwatch.org/springsummer-2020/life-moves-hearts-turn-back-beloved-souls-following-big-cats-fourteen-years-catskill-game-farm-rescue/

team. Questionnaires have been circulated among local people and will be utilized by QGIS (an open-source Geographic Information System) to map the population and distribution of softshell species. “Since local people and laymen from remote areas are our priority and our main source of information for studying the softshell turtles, an awareness program and need for conservation of these turtles among the local people and school students, forest department staff, and turtle hunters are carried out as far as possible. Our aim is to involve them as much as possible,” says Prof. Lalremsanga. The long-term community-based approach relies on local monitoring and rescue teams who will monitor and execute the necessary conservation related work.

GRANT IMPETUS

Prof. Lalremsanga’s work to map their population, distribution, and learn more about their habitats in Mizoram has recently won a Habitats Trust Grant as well. Rushikesh Chavan, who heads the Habitats Trust explains, “**The freshwater turtles of northeast India are under threat from several anthropogenic activities. H.T Lalremsanga’s proposal to save these lesser-known species is central to The Habitats Trust.** He and his team

One of the other reasons for the dwindling numbers is also loss of habitat due to deforestation, construction of dams for hydro-electric power, use of dynamo for catching fish, poisoning of streams, rivers, or drainages, dumping of waste near water bodies and the shortage of legal awareness programs.

have the local knowledge of the language, culture, and terrain, along with a track record of working on research and conservation in Mizoram and Manipur. **One of the major ecological outcomes of the project will be an understanding of the distribution and habitat used** by softshell turtles, and the identification of potential sites for further work. This will set the groundwork for saving some of these threatened turtle species. This makes H.T Lalremsanga’s work on the neglected species and regions of NE India extremely important.”

IMPACT MATTERS

As per The Wild Life (Protection) Amendment

Act 2022 [Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022 came into force on 01/04/2023. Now if any person is found to be in possession of any CITES



PHOTO © THE HABITAT TRUST

listed exotic species, the burden to prove that they were legally obtained would be on him], the Southeast Asian box turtle (*Cuora amboinensis*) has now been listed as a Schedule 1 animal which means it is prohibited from hunting it. “This was as per our suggestion in our scientific research paper in *Herpetology Notes* (Germany) in 2021 called ‘New records of the endangered Southeast Asian Box Turtle, *Cuora amboinensis* (Testudines, Geoemydidae), from Mizoram, Northeast India’ (Volume 14: 1177-1180)’. We are glad for this legal status for this species and we are hoping the same in future for other species which are in need of conservation and legal protection. A huge number of turtles and tortoises were reported to us for relocation by hunters and pet owners from different locations. **There has been a positive impact among government officials and among the local people, and we are happy to see the result and hope for a positive future regarding conservation of the species and their legal implementation among the people via social media and Whatsapp groups,**” concludes Lalremsanga.

If our readers would like to learn more about this conservation project, please contact thehabitustrust.org/H-T-Lalremsanga.php or this article’s author below.

Bindu Gopal Rao is a freelance writer and photographer from Bengaluru. She enjoys birdwatching and environment, as well as taking the offbeat path when traveling. You can follow her on Instagram @bindugoplr Rao and find her work on bindugopalrao.com

R.O.C.K. - Rehabbers Offer Care and Kindness

The Wildlife Watch Hotline - 877-WILDHELP receives hundreds of calls every year from across the country, and a few from Canada. Police departments, conservation agencies, SPCAs, veterinary offices, and federal, state, and municipal offices have referred callers to Wildlife Watch for help.

Your contribution to Wildlife Watch will help us to expand our volunteer service by allowing us to cover phones 24/7 and update our lists as new wildlife rehabilitators come on the scene.

You Need to Know About the Red Creek Wildlife Rehabilitation Center!

Nothing else stirs the soul more than witnessing the joy of an animal who receives a second chance. These two sibling raccoons seem to be whispering: "We made it! I knew we would."

Peggy Hentz is the founder and director of the Red Creek Wildlife and Rehabilitation Center, that takes in thousands of wild animals every year.

Please visit their website: redcreekwildlifecenter.com and get on their contact list to learn more about their plans and progress toward creating a wildlife rehabilitation school!

Additional exciting news is that they helped to craft a bill (H.B. 1522), initiated by the Pocono Wildlife Rehabilitation & Education Center, that would provide state funding for wildlife rehabilitation!

The bill has passed the state House of Representatives and is moving along to what we hope will be a successful outcome.

You can read a press release about the bill here: pahouse.com/InTheNews/NewsRelease/?id=131074



PHOTO COURTESY RED CREEK WILDLIFE REHABILITATION CENTER

CHIMNEY SWIFTS

If you don't have a chimney - and even if you do - we bet you've never heard of these federally-protected migratory birds

We first discovered how unique they are when two baby Chimney Swifts fell into a caller's fireplace.

Here's what makes them unique:

- They are aerial insectivores catching insects in flight.
- One swift can eat 12,000 insects a day!
- They don't perch in trees, but rather cling to rough, vertical structures like tree hollows or chimneys.
- They are a threatened species



- and their population is plummeting largely due to deforestation and homeowners capping their chimneys.
- They are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) and it is illegal to harm them. In fact, homeowners and commercial building owners are encouraged to allow the birds to nest in their chimneys during a

time when they are not in use, and not to cap the chimney for the sake of these birds.

- As they are federally protected, every legitimate chimney sweep is aware that it is illegal to kill them. Further, their nests may not be disturbed.
- They can sleep while flying, they are on the go all day long and only sleep at night.
- Males and females can't be distinguished from each other unlike other bird species. They are both a dusty gray.
- They migrate to South America in the fall and then return in the spring.

Please keep in mind your chimney is the birds' habitat.

PHOTO © UNSPLASH: TYLER JAMIESON MOUTON

CRIMSON-FRONTED PARAKEET OR FINSCH'S PARAKEET

Painting and text by Barry Kent MacKay

These birds weigh around 135 to 175 grams (4.8 to 6.2 ounces – about halfway between a Blue Jay and a Mourning Dove), and are variable in the amount and placement of stray red patches around the head. The red forehead (the crimson “front”) is quite consistent, but mostly or completely lacking in young birds, who also lack the red thigh patches. The species lives in the warmer, tropical zones from sea level to about 1,800 meters (5,900 feet) and are comfortable in secondary forests and ranches, and around the edges of lowland primal forests. They can form noisy flocks.

This is a “good news” bird in that it is adaptable to anthropogenic activity such as the removal of primal forest, which can create the kind of open habitat with stands of trees that they prefer. While very attractive, the species is not in particularly high demand for the exotic pet trade, an industry that has had devastating effects on the conservation of more exotically colored neotropical species of parrots.



You can contact **Barry Kent MacKay**, Bird Artist, Illustrator at his Studio: (905) 472 9731 or email: mimus@sympatico.ca

- fineartamerica.com/profiles/barry-mackay
- barry-mackay.pixels.com

EYE ON THE NEWS: THE U.S. TRANSPORTATION SECRETARY, PETE BUTTIGIEG, IS TURNING INTO A HERO FOR WILDLIFE.

Millions of wild animals are killed every year on our roads.

How often have we passed the bodies of animals on the roads,



PHOTO © UNSPLASH BY AARON VANSIELEGHEM

which in itself can become a fatal distraction?

This sad loss of wildlife as well as humans who are injured and killed has not been addressed at a national level until now.

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation report, “Secretary Pete Buttigieg today announced the first-of-its-kind pilot program to make roads safer, prevent wildlife-vehicle collisions, and improve habitat connectivity... The program makes grant funding available to states and communities to construct wildlife crossings over or below busy roads, add warning signs for drivers, acquire mapping and tracking tools, and more.”

“There are proven practices to prevent crashes between vehicles and wildlife, and with this investment, we’re going to take commonsense steps to reduce collisions and make roads safer for rural and urban communities alike,” Federal Highway Administrator Shailen Bhatt said. “**Thanks to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, communities that may not previously have had access to funding for these critical projects can finally make roads safer while protecting wildlife and their movement corridors.**”

Read more here:

transportation.gov/briefing-room/biden-harris-administration-launches-first-ever-program-improve-safety-americas

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P.O. Box 562,
New Paltz, NY 12561
Phone: 845-256-1400,

e-mail: wildwatch@verizon.net

Website: wildwatch.org

Anne Muller, Editor

We welcome letters/articles/
photos for consideration.

Contributions are
tax-deductible.

WILDLIFE WATCH NEEDS YOU!

Wildlife Watch needs your help more than ever to continue providing our vital wildlife hotline service to the public. We receive calls from across the country, and occasionally from Canada, from people needing help with injured and orphaned wildlife. Our easy to remember number **877WILDHELP** is recommended by veterinary offices, SPCAs, and law enforcement agencies. Additionally, we publish the **Wildlife Watch Binocular** to inform the public about environmental impacts on wild animals, to highlight people who help them, to promote wildlife watching, and to engender understanding that all animals are individuals deserving of kinder treatment.

Will you help our
work? **YES**

wildwatch.org/join/contrib

LET'S GO WILDLIFE WATCHING

Puffins and Whales in Iceland

*Photo and article by
Sherry Reisch*

*The best vacations are
those that are
far from home, with
great vegan food and
wildlife watching*



And this is how I began my search for vegan vacations. Much to my amazement I found a vegan travel company. The reviews were great. Now all I had to do was find the tour to fill two of the requisites; far from home and wildlife watching.

So many great tours, and then I found it! A tour to Iceland with whale and puffin watching for vegans! This was too good to be true! I paid my deposit, booked the flight and weeks later took off for Iceland. I want to add that at first I was hesitant to visit a country that still allowed the hunting and killing of whales. At this particular time whale hunting was not allowed.

Puffins are extraordinary birds. Iceland does not have many trees. Most of the mountains are covered with moss. There are multitudes of moss species on this island. **So where do the puffins nest? They nest in the side of the cliffs along the coastline.** This does not make it an easy task to see them. **A trick to finding them is to look at the crevices on the cliffs where you see their white "poop". Once you lay your eyes on them it is hard to look away. So different from bird watching in New York City!** These birds are colorful with their reddish orange beaks, dashes of yellow and what looks like black eyeliner surrounding their eyes. Just spectacular. After leaving the cliffs, and walking on a beach, we came across a harbour seal.

The day of whale watching was cold and rainy and grey. But we were not disappointed. It turned out to be feeding time. What we saw were their massive bodies in, what looked like, a "u" shape. That is the posture taken when the whales dive to catch their meal. We saw the common minke whale and harbour porpoise. The scientist who led this excursion was very knowledgeable and advised us of the cues she will use when she spots a whale. This was both exciting and fun. **It was on this voyage that we learned Iceland may resume whale hunting. Our tour scientist spoke openly against it and gave us a website to visit to sign a petition urging Iceland to keep the no hunting and killing of whales. It made me happy to know that an Icelander was outspoken against this hunt.**

If you would like to sign the petition, please visit: lastwhalingstation.com

Sherry Reisch is a frequent traveler and staunch vegan. She discovered vegjauntsandjourneys.com, you might want to check it out.

Wildlife Watch
PO Box 562,
New Paltz, NY 12561



**NEED HELP FOR
INJURED OR ORPHANED
WILDLIFE?
CALL THE WILDLIFE
WATCH HOTLINE!
1-877-WILDHEL(P)
(1-877-945-3435)**

Wildlife Watch maintains current lists of wildlife rehabilitators around the country. Our hotline helps us to help hundreds of people and animals annually. Please help us by becoming a Wildlife Watch member for \$25 annually and please make an additional contribution for the R.O.C.K. Project that will be put into a fund and used to help a rehabber help wild animals. R.O.C.K. Project funds will be distributed at our discretion up to the amount available.

You can contribute by PayPal by clicking here:
wildwatch.org/contribute

✓ Contribute by phone with a credit card. 845-256-1400

✓ Contribute by mail:
Wildlife Watch, P.O. Box 562,
New Paltz, NY 12561



PHOTO © ANNE MULLER

BANJI'S CAMO

Can you find Banji?

I couldn't resist buying this blankey for Banji. It looked like him and even felt like him.

Although he snuggled into it the first day, he has since decided that he doesn't like it.

He's such a gregarious cat who has to be the center of attention that my guess is he wants to stand out.

•••••
• If anyone is a cat psychologist and has any insight into why he
• rejected his blankey, please share.
•

• If you have a favorite photo of your cat, please email an
• attachment for the next issue of the Wildlife Watch Binocular:
• **wildwatch@verizon.net**
•