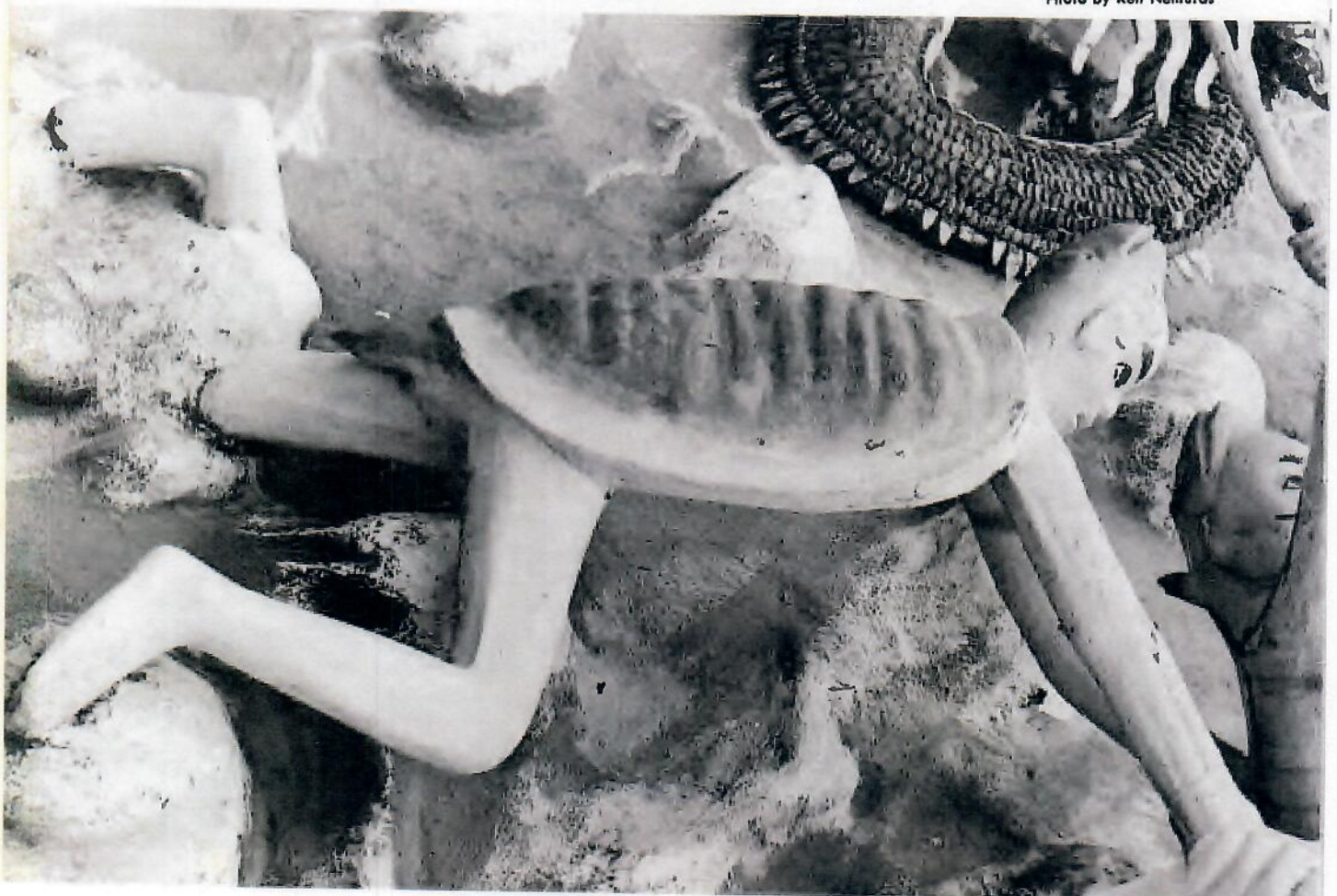


ODDS
AND
ENDS
AND
TURTLES

The Onandaga Indians of America believed the Chief of Heaven created the world when he became jealous of his wife. He uprooted the Tree of Life in Heaven and thrust his wife down through the hole in the sky. As the Sky Woman fell, the waterfowl soared up to catch her. The Loon had the water animals bring soil from the sea so Sky Woman could land. The Muskrat put the soil on the back of a Snapping Turtle so that it made a little island above the water. Sky Woman was then gently taken to the new ground by the birds. She became the Great Earth Mother in Indian legends.

So goes one of the many legends that have surrounded turtles for centuries. Often play-

Photo by Ken Nemuras



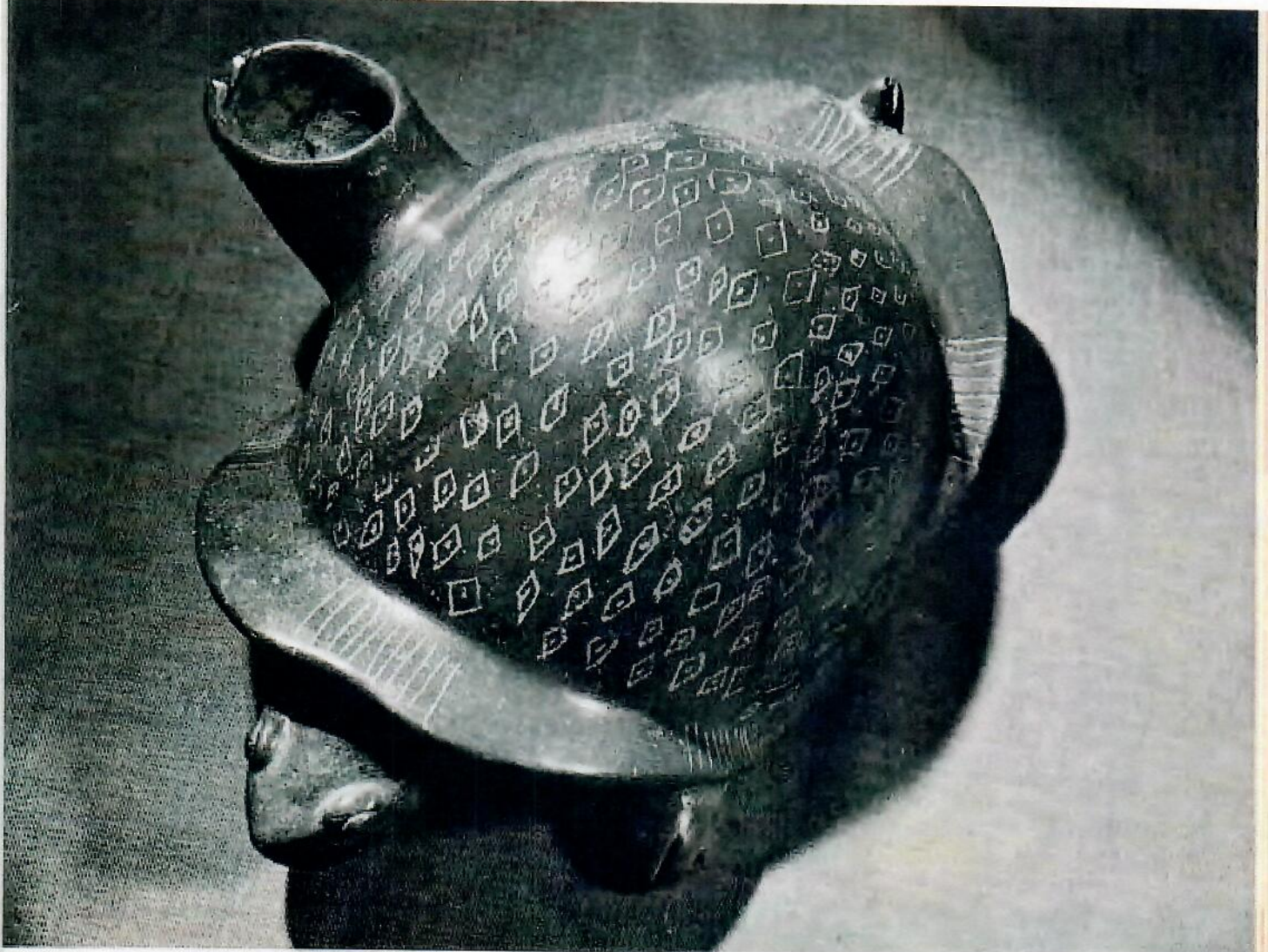


Photo by Richard Swingler

- **TOP** — Example of pre-Columbian artifact, probably used as water or wine container. Such art objects were decorated with appropriate lines and markings. Note design on carapace. **LEFT** — This figure, in Tiger Balm Garden on Hong Kong Island, is similar to the "kappa" in Japanese folk legends, a part-turtle creature of the waters.

ing only an incidental part in the tale being told, turtles of the world, both fictional and actual, have appeared over and over again in legends of all cultures. Often amusing, always intriguing, and sometimes containing historical fact, these tales have fascinated young and old alike.

From "Outlines of Chinese Symbolism and Art Motives," by C.A.S. Williams (published by Kelly & Walsh, Ltd., Shanghai, 1941), we quote a portion of the chapter on "The Tortoise".

"The written symbol for this reptile is a

pictogram showing the snake-like head above claws on the left, shell on the right, and the tail below. Tortoises are kept in tanks in Buddhist temples, and it is considered very meritorious to feed them, or to add to their numbers by purchasing them alive from the stalls of the street, where they are constantly exposed for sale as food. When a tortoise is thus purchased, a hole is made in the shell, and a creature with several such holes, often filled with rings, is much prized for medicinal purposes. Jelly made from the plastron, or the powdered shell made into pills, or mixed up in cakes, is reputed to be tonic, cordial, astringent and arthritic, and very useful in diseases of the kidneys.

"The Chinese employ the tortoise to open up gutters and drains, as it is fond of burrowing in the earth. The tortoise is vulgarly known as (1) *Wang Pa*, from a nickname given by the people of the village to Wang Chien, who, after a youth spent in violence and rascality, became the founder of the

- **RIGHT** — Stamps and coins issued by Fiji Islands in 1969. The “window” shape, cut out to display each coin, is copied from ceremonial bowl or *tanoa*. **BELOW** — Closeup of 1 cent bronze coin, which features the *tanoa* used in drinking ceremonies. Some *tanoas* have three legs, some have four as shown in one of the cancel marks appearing on this colorful set. (Photo courtesy of 99 Company, Capistrano Beach, California.)



Earlier Shu State, dying A.D. 918; or (2) as *Wang-po*, ‘the creature that forgets the eight rules of right and wrong — viz., politeness, decorum, integrity, sense of shame, filial piety, fraternal duty, loyalty, and fidelity’ — from a superstitious belief in the unchastity of the female. Hence, *wang-pa* is a common term of abuse.

“According to the ‘Book of Rites’, the unicorn, phoenix, tortoise, and dragon are ‘the four spiritually endowed creatures’. The tortoise is sacred to China, and is an emblem of longevity, strength, and endurance. It was said to be an attendant of P’AN KU when he chiselled out the world. Under the name of ‘Black Warrior’ it presides over the Northern Quadrant of the uranoscope and symbolizes winter. The tortoise symbolizes the universe to the Chinese as well as the Hindus. Its dome-shaped back represents the vault of the sky, its belly the earth, which moves upon the waters; and its fabulous longevity leads to its being considered imperishable.

"The *kuei*, or tortoise, is the chief of all shelly animals — 'because its nature is spiritual.' The upper vaulted part of its shell, says the Pên Ts'ao, has various markings corresponding to the constellations in the heavens, and is the *yang*; the lower even shell has lines answering to the earth, and is the *yin*. The divine tortoise has a snake's head, and a dragon's neck; the bones are on the outside of the body, and flesh within; the intestines are joined to the head. It has broad shoulders and a large waist; the sexes are known by



- **TOP RIGHT** — Bell patterned after ancient monuments is typical of Korean art, usually honoring ancestors of prominent local citizens. Made of brass, delicately etched, it is a proud possession of those specializing in antique Oriental art. **BOTTOM LEFT** — A priceless *tanoa*, communal bowl, in which yagona (kava) is mixed and served, once belonged to King Cakabau of the Fiji Islands, is now in the museum at Suva. **BOTTOM RIGHT** — Yama, vedic keeper of the underworld, astride G. Atlas, is shown beside a live 3-year-old *T. c. triunguis*. The turtle is prominent in Hindu mythology.

Photo by Chuck Garard





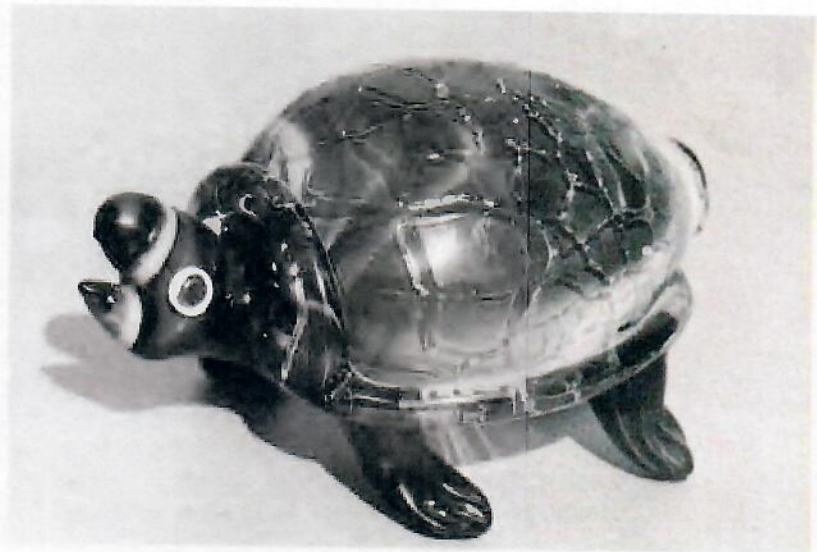
- **ABOVE** — Hand-carved, detailed teakwood turtle from Hong Kong. Many of the most attractive likenesses come from the Orient where the turtle is revered in both fact and legend. **RIGHT** — From Thailand, delicately carved of native wood set with pieces of colored glass to catch the light, this turtle is typical of native handcraft. **BELOW** — Two-inch German candle holder of interesting design. Black crisscross lines contrast strikingly with highly-polished bronze areas of the figure's shields.



examining the lower shell. The male comes out in spring, when it changes its shell, and returns to its torpid state in the winter, which is the reason that the tortoise is very long-lived. Chinese authors describe ten sorts of tortoise; one of them is said to become hairy in its old age, after long domestication. Another has its shell marked with various lines resembling characters, and it is the opinion among some of the Chinese that their writing was first suggested by the lines on the tortoise shell, and the constellations of the sky. The shell was employed in divination and fortune telling.

“Divers marvelous tales are narrated with regard to its fabulous longevity and its faculty of transformation. It is said to conceive by thought alone, and hence the ‘prog-

• **RIGHT** — Multi-colored glass tortoise is an example of art pieces manufactured in the southwestern United States. **BELOW** — An antique metal “frog” (to hold flower arrangements). Many such antique forms, when cleaned and polished, reveal authentic details, such as scales on limbs. **BOTTOM** — Painted expression and swirls on exaggerated carapace of this turtle are typical of “free form” art in which the turtle “goes modern.”



eny of the tortoise', knowing no father, is vulgarly taken as a synonym for the bastard-born. A species of the tortoise kind is called *pieh*, the largest form of which is *luan*, in whose nature the qualities of the tortoise and the dragon are combined. This creature is the attendant of the god of the waters, and it has the power of assuming divers transformations. In the shape of the tortoise is also depicted the *pi-hsi*, a god of the rivers, to whom enormous strength is attributed; and this supernatural monster is frequently sculptured in stone as the support of huge

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Photo by Richard Swingler

Odds and Ends and Turtles

monumental tablets planted immovably as it were, upon its steadfast back. The conception is probably derived from the same source with that of the Hindoo legend of the tortoise supporting an elephant, on whose back the existing world reposes.

"The 'Record of Science' puts the age limit of the tortoise at 1,000 years. Wang Ch'ung, however, states in his 'Lun Hêng', that when the tortoise has lived 300 years, it is no bigger than a coin, and may still walk on a lotus leaf; when 3,000 years old, its colour is blue with green rims, and it is then only one foot, two inches, in size.

"It is said that the wooden columns of the Temple of Heaven at Peking were originally set on live tortoises, under the belief that as these animals are supposed to live for more than 3,000 years without food and air, they are gifted with miraculous power to preserve the wood from decay."

A myth of Asiatic origin concerns the Supreme Lord of Dark Heaven (Lord of the North) whose official title is 'Holy and Propitious Prince of the North Pole'. He rules over the northern quarter of the sky and the world, is ruler of water among the five elements, and, lastly, drives away evil spirits.

He is usually represented as he appeared to the Emperor Hui-tsung of the Sung dynasty, when the latter had him evoked in 1118. The incantation took place at noon in the palace. In the middle of the ceremony, the skies were suddenly darkened, and amid thunder and lightning, a great serpent and a giant tortoise appeared. The Emperor prostrated himself and offered incense, then he prayed to god to show himself in person. In a fresh peal of thunder, tortoise and serpent vanished, and a colossal human foot was perceived before the door of the palace. The Emperor prostrated himself afresh and asked if the god would be pleased to manifest himself in entirety. He then beheld a man more than ten feet high, with grave countenance, surrounded with a halo, loosened hair over his back, long sleeves falling to the ground, covered with a gold cuirass and a girdle of precious stones, a sword in his hand. He stood for a few moments and then disappeared.

The Emperor, who was a famous painter, had taken advantage, so they say, of these brief moments, to draw his portrait; it is this portrait that has served as a model for many

modern pictures. Usually an armed squire is placed behind him, carrying his black banner; the god himself is set on the back of the tortoise, encircled by the serpent, and floating on the waters, as is fitting, since he is the ruler of the North and water is the element corresponding to the northern quarter.

This tortoise and serpent upon which he rests are interpreted in totally different ways by various Chinese authors. To some, they are two celestial officers placed under his orders; according to others, they are, on the contrary, enemy demons whom he has conquered and whom he is treading under his feet. In point of fact, the wreathed serpent and tortoise are the god himself in his first shape, more ancient than the present anthropomorphic personage. They are met with from the time of the Han dynasty as the symbol of the northern region of the world in the funeral chambers of the second century.

In Japanese folklore, the story of Kappa, the Water Goblin, is as follows:

"The *Kappa* is an amphibious monster who is said to live chiefly in the rivers of the island of Kyushu. This legendary being, in his classic aspect, has the body of a tortoise, the extremities of a frog, and the head of a monkey, with a short but very strong beak in place of a mouth. On top of his head is a shallow cavity like a small saucer or basin; this is filled with a liquid from which he draws his entire strength. The kappa can attack human beings, drawing them into the water and drowning them in order to feed himself on their entrails. He is fond of children and especially of young women, whom he abuses before eating them.

"There is, however, a very simple method of frustrating his attacks. This is to be extremely polite to him when one has the bad luck to meet him, and to bow quite low in greeting him. The kappa, despite his ferocity, is well brought up, and he will return one's bow with an equally deep one, whereupon the liquid in the depression on top of his head will spill out on the ground — and with it his strength will vanish. It is then one is able to capture him.

"Near Matsue, in Izumo on the Sea of Japan is a village named Kawachi-mura. There, on the bank of the Kawachi River, is a small temple in which is preserved a document ostensibly signed by a kappa. The story goes that in former times a kappa who lived in the river killed a great many people and even attacked cattle and horses which came there to drink. One day a horse entered the water

to quench his thirst and was set upon by the monster. The kappa was seriously injured in the struggle that took place, but he would not let go of the horse. Finally the terrified horse dragged him out of the water and across the fields to the middle of Kawachi-mura.

"There the excited villagers seized the kappa and tied him up with the intention of killing him. But he pleaded so vigorously for his life that the people decided on a less extreme form of punishment. In order to save himself, he was forced to sign an agreement in which he promised never again to molest man, woman, child, or beast belonging to Kawachi-mura. It is this document that is preserved in the temple near the river, and the

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Turtle Bogue

hundreds in a single night. Yet farther down the beach, near the property of Juana Lopez, a multifaceted old woman who can be read about in some detail in Archie Carr's "The Windward Road," we found few turtles nesting among the slaughtered carcasses of some who tried.

Turtle fishermen in Costa Rica have made it clear that they will not respect any laws prohibiting capture of the turtles. One morning in August, during a period of calm seas when a boat could be taken through the surf, a feat usually impossible due to the turbulent coastline, turtle poachers came onto the beach within sight of Gene and David, absconding with three of our turned turtles before they could get there to do anything about it. After that incident, a patrol boat was returned to the area --- there had been one in July but it had returned to Puerto Limón. Present Costa Rican law prescribes a distance of five kilometers from shore as the closest that turtle fishing boats may approach. However, as a law is only as effective as its enforcement, turtles will be safe nowhere unless there are patrols by boat and on the beaches to insure their safety. The poaching is not limited to Costa Ricans, nor even to Latins, but is carried on by fishermen of various nationalities, including some from the United States.

The 1969 season closed with more than a thousand turtles having been tagged, a better record than any previous summer. This is partly due to there being more taggers. But there was unquestionably a markedly greater number of turtles than in 1968. What the

villagers affirm that the kappa, up till now, has kept his promise."

Folklore of the Asiatic cultures most often depicts the turtle as a wise, benevolent creature, who, after enduring injustice or mistreatment for anywhere from a hundred to a thousand years, takes his place among the dieties of the land or heavens.

The same theme of "testing" runs through the tales of almost all countries, with the setting of the scene somewhat varied to reflect the culture in which it takes place; but whatever the country, there is undoubtedly a native legend or two that concerns the immortality, strength, or wisdom of the turtle or tortoise as he strives to overcome the odds against him.

figures suggest is this: there must have been a very good year in 1968 on the feeding flats, the results being a great influx of young turtles on a two-year nesting cycle in 1969. No one knows exactly how long it takes a green turtle to reach breeding maturity in the wild. And although the average length of turtles measured in the 1969 season was surprisingly close to the average for past years, about 89 inches, there was a far greater number of small females. So the majority of that population is young; perhaps most of the older ones have ended in the cannery in Puerto Limón. The abundance of last summer could be deceptive. There appears to be a population sufficiently strong to hold its own. But if the turtle poaching, and even legal killing of them, continues unchecked, a few bad years for young ones could reduce the population to a critically low level. There are less and less large turtles, and it is doubtful that they are dying of old age. What is really needed is an effective prohibition of *any* turtle killing for a few years, until the population has established an unquestioned stability. Then, and only then, would controlled killing be justified.

The balance of an apparently successful species' population may be upset quite readily by man's interference. There is a depressing, lengthening list of proof. Hopefully, the efforts of conservationists, in conjunction with those of government officials, will prevent *Chelonia mydas* from joining the list of "extinct" or "nearly-extinct" animals, not only in Costa Rica but on all the beaches,