

OBITUARY: Boyd Nathaniel Lyon 1969-2006

Peter C.H. Pritchard

Chelonian Research Institute, 402 South Central Ave., Oviedo, FL 32765 USA (E-mail: ChelonianRI@aol.com)

Boyd Lyon's application to be a graduate student at the University of Central Florida was rejected at first. It seems his CV was simply too unusual. He was 36 years old, and had spent much of the previous decade as a sports and soccer coach after having achieved some unremarkable grades while on an athletic scholarship to San Diego State University in the early 1990s. True, Boyd had worked on sea turtles for the National Marine Fisheries Service in La Jolla for the last three years, and his brief inventory of postgraduate courses yielded a straight A average, but competition was strong, and the Biology Department had made its decision.

Or so it thought. Most people would have given up on UCF, perhaps with muttered irritation or disappointment, and applied elsewhere. But Boyd was not "most people." He wrote back to a bemused graduate advisor, starting with a breezy salutation "Hi, John!", not complaining, but simply commenting that the news was "rather surprising," and recommending that his application be revisited. Boyd had his sights firmly set on UCF, and he would accept no other. He enlisted Lew Ehrhart's support and mine as well, which was freely given in both cases. Lew was semi-retired and I was an adjunct professor with my own research institute to keep me busy; but we were his turtle godfathers, and we recognized a special case when we saw one. Boyd also provided a crackerjack letter of recommendation from Jeff Seminoff, his friend and supervisor at NMFS. He flew back to Orlando to make his case, and, well steeped in the art of friendly persuasion, he brought me a rare gift for the Institute – a magnificent carapace, with scutes, of a large black turtle (*Chelonia agassizi*) from the Revillagigedo Islands population, which I think he carried as checked baggage. He also submitted a new and revised three-page single-spaced letter to accompany his application – one that spelled out his history, carefully de-emphasizing his athletic achievements, and describing his lifelong infatuation with marine turtles. A visit with his father to Mazatlan when he was nine years old had shown him his first sea turtle, and a Christmas gift of Encyclopedia of Turtles from his mother combined with his watching a PBS Special on the leatherback turtle and its mysterious life cycle clinched the deal. His mother still remembers having to tell him to stop cutting pictures out of my book to stick on the wall of his bedroom.

Boyd had a fine-tuned disdain for the word 'no' that obviously got him into graduate school, and several years earlier helped get his position with the NMFS turtle team. In fact, "thanks but no thanks" were the first words he ever heard from Jeff Seminoff when asking about volunteer opportunities with NMFS. He had been interested in working at Southwest Fisheries Science Center in La Jolla California as part of the Marine Turtle Team and was not going to let this negative response curb his enthusiasm. After two more telephone conversations, he finally convinced Seminoff to meet him one December evening in 2002. His 'foot in the door' phrase went along the lines of 'please just let me come by the lab to speak with you in person and if after that you still don't need any

assistance I'll leave you alone'. Shortly thereafter the two met and, needless to say, Boyd got the gig.

He knew there would be diversions along the way, but he planned to be a turtle man – indeed, by now he already was one, having done in-depth field studies of black turtles in both western Mexico and the Galapagos during his NMFS years.

The doubters in the Biology Department administration fell silent, and his application was accepted.

Months before he left California to take up his UCF appointment, I happened to go to San Diego for a Turtle Survival Alliance meeting, and Boyd insisted that I stay in his apartment in a wonderful beachfront corner of western San Diego that had the hippie atmosphere of Gainesville in the 1960s. With characteristic hospitality, he vacated his bedroom on my behalf, and after the TSA meeting was over we joined up with Jeff Seminoff to explore Central Baja and make a quixotic search for pond turtles in the desert at the extreme southern terminus of their range. I had not seen Baja for over thirty years, and was delighted to see that the magnificent cactus forests were still intact despite the massive southward sprawl of the scrofulous border towns since my last visit. For several days we found no turtles, but finally we hit paydirt. We walked for miles along a bone-dry rocky canyon at the southernmost point of our trip, that eventually led to a cool creek with gin-clear water less than a foot deep. The three of us fanned out, and when we re-grouped after half an hour I was triumphantly clutching a live adult Pacific pond turtle. To my surprise, so was Boyd; and so was Jeff.

So the climax was exciting, but the trip was also a chance for me to get to know Boyd, a chance that I am most grateful not to have missed. I will always be grateful for the amount of quality time we had during the brief year that I knew him. I never knew anyone so unremittingly positive and happy, so committed, so optimistic.

Boyd was a good looking dude, over six feet tall and with the wiry physique of an athlete. Although a Pennsylvanian by background, you could only think "California" (or "surfer") when you saw his tanned features and half-smile of utter confidence. Having finished all preparations for his journey, he set out from San Diego for Florida in his camper-van, with his worldly possessions and his two beloved dogs in the back. His route angled north to take him through Las Vegas, where he picked up a live alligator snapping turtle for me that Bob Winokur had kept for no less than fifty years. Upon arrival in Orlando there was some confusion as to where his dogs would stay until he found a place to live, but Tim Walsh came to the rescue and offered to keep them at his house in Sanford. He quickly joined and was welcomed and accepted by Lew Ehrhart's turtle crew, which consisted mostly of female graduate students a decade or more younger than himself. With his athlete's physique, he was able single-handedly to pull in nets laden with loggerheads and green turtles, doubtless aware of the admiring glances from his fellow students. He also shook me out of my own procrastination in going out on the lagoons to join the turtle crew. I went out twice

from the technical and legal aspects of this development, some key concerns for marine turtles are artificial lighting and its potential impact on hatchlings, and the impacts of dredging on turtles at sea. The nesting site lies in direct line of sight of the port development, and the glow from the port will be seen many miles beyond the nesting site. Also of concern is the secondary development that will undoubtedly spring up behind the port and may bring added impacts to the turtles and their habitats.

The mission was carried out at the invitation of Mr. Ratan Tata, Chairman of the Tata Group of Industries, to address the conflicts that have arisen in the development of this project. A draft report on the mission has been prepared and submitted to the IUCN Regional Office, and will be forwarded to the Dhamra Port group shortly. Following this, further engagement of IUCN specialists, particularly our members in the country, is likely, and we will continue to provide updates as the report is made public and decisions have been made on the best way forward.

SWoT Report, Volume 2 & Report on the SWoT Outreach Grants Program

We are pleased to report that the *State of the World's Sea Turtles (SWoT) Report, Volume 2* is on schedule to be published and distributed at the 27th Annual Sea Turtle Symposium in February 2007, and will feature the loggerhead and leatherback nesting beaches of the world, with nesting data from the last complete nesting season in 2005 at all available beaches. Please look for the SWoT booth at the 27th Symposium to pick up a copy.

In the last quarter, the MTSO facilitated the first *SWoT Report*

Outreach Grants Program, which provided five \$1,000 grants to support education and outreach projects incorporating content from the first *SWoT Report*. These projects were carried out by the MarineLife Alliance in Bangladesh, the Guyana Marine Turtle Conservation Society in Guyana, WWF Malaysia (Sabah), Kolej Universiti Sains dan Teknologi Malaysia (KUSTEM), and by the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL). After project completion in late 2006, final reports from each were reviewed by the SWoT coordinators, and one project leader was selected for sponsorship to the 27th Annual Sea Turtle Symposium (STS) in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, USA. Although all projects were very successful and worthy of recognition, Edward Aruna of CSSL was awarded this distinction and his participation in the 27th STS will be sponsored by the SWoT project.

With the *SWoT Report* Outreach Grant funds, Edward and his team designed a workshop around *SWoT Report*, using it as a curriculum to look at the worldwide status of sea turtles and Sierra Leone's place within that global view. Using specific articles within the workshop, they examined conservation activities in other areas of the world and reviewed the current state of sea turtle conservation in Sierra Leone. The 55 workshop participants included university professors and students, police, journalists (who covered the story in the next day's news), secondary school teachers, officials from the ministry of tourism and ministry of environment, NGO representatives, coastal community members, and harbor masters. These participants have agreed become a network of people who continue to spread the word about sea turtle conservation and support sea turtle conservation activities in the future.

Meeting Report

Workshop on Marine Turtles in Taiwan, May 2006

I-Jiunn Cheng

Institute of Marine Biology, National Taiwan Ocean University, Keelung, Taiwan, 202-24, R.O.C. (E-mail: b0107@mail.ntou.edu.tw)

The International Workshop for Sea Turtle Stranding and Necropsy in Taiwan was held in Makung, Penghu County, Taiwan, Republic of China (ROC) on May 2 & 3, 2006. The participants consisted of veterinarians from various domestic county livestock disease control centers, relevant county officials as well as faculties and students from the Veterinary Department of several universities. Professor C.H. Diong from Nanyang Technological University, Singapore also participated in the workshop.

The workshop recognized that all sea turtles in Taiwan are listed as endangered species (equivalent to Category I of the Red List). Therefore, all stranded sea turtles are required to be reported to the relevant authorities. However, due to limited manpower and the different stranding report procedures followed by different counties, the spatial variation in stranding reports is high. This inconsistent reporting system may in the long run have a negative impact on sea turtle conservation in Taiwan. In addition, diagnosing the health condition and necropsy, both of which are very important to the conservation and management of sea turtles, are only available to a limited degree in Taiwan. The purpose of this workshop was to invite three experts, namely Thierry Work (USGS-NWHC-HFS,

Hawaii), Robert Morris (NMFS, Green Sea Turtle Project, Hawaii) and George Balazs (NOAA, Hawaii) from the US to exchange information and field experiences and provide us with useful recommendations regarding the current stranding report procedure. The workshop was divided into two parts: a public presentation by the three experts from the US and the three experts from Taiwan followed by a discussion session, and then sessions on necropsy including health inspection/ disease diagnostics. The workshop stressed the need to set up standard procedures for a sea turtle stranding network and necropsy/health inspections in Taiwan.

The workshop report was well received by both the Science and Technology Policy Research Information Center of the National Science Council. The National Central Library, R.O.C. placed the workshop report on their library collection list. Copies of the workshop report are available in the electronic form. Because most participants were Chinese, the report is written mainly in Chinese. You can download the workshop report in PDF format as well as the audio and video files of the practice sessions using the FTP software. The IP address is 140.121.200.84, the ID is any, the s/n is any5303, and the port is 5314.