

TURTLE POETRY

Editorial Introduction. — This section is devoted to poetry involving turtles, representing either reprinted previously published or new unpublished material. We encourage our readers to submit poetry or songs for consideration, either their own material or work by other authors. Poems may be submitted to Anders G.J. Rhodin, Chelonian Research Foundation, E-mail: RhodinCRF@aol.com.

Our desire is to share with our readers the beauty and wonder of turtles as expressed through the art of the poem or song. In the sense that the relationship between humans and turtles is multifaceted, so too is turtle poetry. The poems we publish here will reflect that complexity, from poems of pure admiration for the creatures themselves to others reflecting the utilization of turtles and their products. Some poems will reflect people's use of the turtle for sustenance, others will stress our need to preserve and protect turtles. Some will deal with our emotional interactions with turtles, others will treat turtles light-heartedly or with seeming disrespect, but all will hopefully help us to better understand both the human and the chelonian condition, and remind us that the turtle holds a sacred place in all our hearts.

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Sea Traveler ¹

TERESA HALL

One with the sea and the sea with me,
into these emerald depths I plunge
following her mystery.

Where luminescent trails trace
each dancing sea creature's
symbiotic embrace.

Fronds sway hypnotically,
enticing me into the deep,
hidden in their nurturing arms –
I sleep.

Drawn from afar my suitors await,
we spiral in heavenly formation
then procreate.

I'll carry my precious cargo
thousands of miles to where I was
born, sandy beaches await –
it's a long way home.

One magical night the sea sings
her song.
Hatchlings hear her voice calling
and they respond.

One with the sea and the sea with me,
into these emerald depths I plunge
following her mystery...

Editorial Comments. — I received this poem from George Balazs earlier this year after he had received it from Teresa Hall, an award-winning poet from Toronto, Canada, who had been inspired to write it after virtually attending a Sea Turtle Workshop held in Hawaii earlier this year. I contacted Teresa for the background of the poem, and this is what she wrote:

“My whole family has always loved the sea and been drawn to its life-giving qualities. My brother and I were luckily brought up on National Geographic Magazines given by a kindly aunt who lived in what was then known as the British Honduras (= Belize). This started a love for conservation of wildlife and ecosystems on this incredible planet that we all share and call home. As a result, my brother has traveled from the mountains of Tibet and Mongolia to the Amazon and Arctic, etc. as a geologist, while I've reached out to others through my nature poetry.

I've always been amazed at how sea turtles know how to return to their nesting grounds across thousands of miles of ocean—some species all at the same time. They speak of an ancient symbiotic relationship with our Earth which fascinates and when we see their numbers falling, we know that we must do all that we can to protect and preserve them and I think this is why so many thoughtful biologists have entered into sea turtle research. Through their work they have also found that they are keystone species.

Because of this interest I attended the Sea Turtle Workshop in Hawaii by zoom and was so impressed with the researchers' progressive, detailed work and also of the story of Adelita, a Loggerhead Turtle, and how she was fitted with a satellite tag in pioneering research by the late Wallace J. Nichols and tracked for thousands of miles from Baja California to Japan—a mind-boggling feat.

I already had an outline for a poem about sea turtles which I re-wrote with the goal in mind of dedicating *Sea Traveler* to all of those incredibly dedicated researchers while also hoping to inspire others, especially children, about these amazing travelers of the deep.”

Indeed, I found her poem to be inspiring and reflective of the ever-widening community of turtle conservationists, whether scientists, field managers and practitioners, or people from all walks of life. It is inspiring to see how the sea turtle conservation community has grown over the past few decades. I recall attending the very first Annual Sea Turtle Research Workshop in Jacksonville, Florida, back in 1981—when Archie Carr, Peter Pritchard, and Karen Bjorndal were our leaders, but the total gathering was only 30 people. Since then, the Workshop has grown into an annual International Sea Turtle Symposium, with huge numbers of attendees, both in person and, like Teresa, virtually. The community grows, and with it, its effectiveness at safeguarding threatened species. Just this year, the Green Turtle was down-listed by the IUCN to Least Concern, reflective of global conservation successes over the past decades. Congratulations to all involved in achieving this improved status for that iconic sea turtle species.

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Submitted by George H. Balazs.