Over a decade since the first Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Field Skill Training Course was held in Cuc Phuong National Park, Vietnam, the course continues to be a hit with University students and young conservationists alike. This year the training, which was held from the 28th of March to the 4th of April 2015, included 10 participants, 6 undergraduate students from national universities, one of them was a Laotian student, one Masters candidate, one lecturer from Bac Giang University, one ranger from a Bach Ma National park and one conservation officer from Mui Ca Mau biosphere reserve area.

Student Nguyen Phat Tai from Ho Chi Minh University of Sciences (left) and Nguyen Tuan Cuong, lecturer from Bac Giang Agriculture and Forestry University (right) get to grips with turtles during the animal handling practical. Photo by: Nguyen Tai Thang - ATP
The 8-day training course continues to have a strong practical focus. With a combination of lectures and field practicals reinforcing skill learnt on species identification, trapping and surveys, interview techniques and the use of equipment such as map and GPS. Mr Bui Dang Phong from the Department of Nature Conservation from the Vietnam Administration of Forestry under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) presented a new section on laws, legislation and red listing. A special guest visitor, Dr. Ross Kiester from the Turtle Conservancy (TC), USA, also presented on his historic surveys made in Vietnam in 1996, it was some of these early photographs by Dr Kiester that made much of the outside world aware of the developing turtle crisis in Vietnam.

During the practical on interview surveys three Keeled Box Turtles (*Cuora mouhotii*), two juveniles and one adult were observed at two local households in Bai Ca Village, Cuc Phuong Commune. Unfortunately the observation of animals in local households continues with these animals likely originating from Cuc Phuong National Park, many local people describe encountering turtles opportunistically while undertaking other activities such as collection of snails or firewood.

Press Release by: Nguyen Thu Thuy – ATP
Date: 10th April 2015

We would like to thank Cleveland Metroparks Zoo for supporting this activity. As well as Cuc Phuong National Park, Ninh Binh Province for their continued collaboration on this long term joint training activity.

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Participants and trainers pose with the Hoan Kiem Turtle (Rafetus swinhoei) for a photograph. Photo by: Asian Turtle Program

A second team in the GPS challenge, hoping they are on the road to victory. Photo by: Nguyen Tai Thang - ATP

Pham Van Thong of the ATP guides students during the GPS treasure hunt challenge. All practicals are designed to be fun yet educational. Photo by: Nguyen Tai Thang - ATP

Participants and trainers pose with the Hoan Kiem Turtle (Rafetus swinhoei) for a photograph. Photo by: Asian Turtle Program