

Agrionemys horsfieldii **(Central Asian tortoise)**



Photo by Brian L.

Annual report 2012

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1. Introduction

Agrionemys horsfieldii is a popular and one of the most kept tortoise in captivity. It's sometimes seen as a rather easy to keep tortoise which is unfortunately not true. The species has been imported since decades in large numbers. Many of these animals die within a couple of years due to bad housing conditions and diseases.

2. Studbook population

In total 85 animals are kept (105 in 2009, 93 in 2008). It concerns 28 males, 41 females and 16 with (still) unknown sex.

3. Locations

The species is kept at 18 locations (23 in 2010, 24 in 2009, 30 in 2007), all in the Netherlands.

4. Birth

Breeding results of *Agrionemys horsfieldii* are improving the recent years. This is probably due to the fact that more and more imported young animals get mature. The young animals are not automatically registered in the studbook.

5. Imports

The species is still imported in rather large numbers. The countries of central Asia in particular Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are the main supplies of the horsfieldii tortoises to the international trade. From Uzbekistan some "ranche activities" are known. Adult animals are harvested in the wild. Juveniles obtained from these wild taken animals are considered F1 specimens and get exported mainly to Europe, US and Japan.

6. Death

Sadly enough each year tortoises still die. Most animals died shortly after waking up from hibernation. One of the reasons can be that the animals are kept in too moist hibernation conditions.

7. Discussion

The number of animals in the studbook is decreasing due to a decreasing number of locations keeping *Agrionemys horsfieldii* and an ongoing mortality of animals directly after hibernation. Too moist hibernation conditions could be due to this.

In this year at 2 locations all animals are tested positive for herpes. The studbook will take action to investigate how many animals within the studbook are infected with this virus. Knowing which locations are housing herpes positive animals can be important information in case of transfer (new) animals. This investigating will start in spring 2013.

Members of this studbook who decided to stop keeping *Agrionemys horsfieldii*, sell their animals without informing the studbook keeper or the other participants of the studbook.

Because of this many animals get lost for the studbook. Sadly enough in most cases it considers wild hatched animals. These animals have genetically a high value for the studbook, much more than the nowadays imported farm bred tortoises.

At new locations most of the time new imported tortoises are kept which are probably farm bred animals .

8. News

Timo Paasikunnas from Finland will be the new studbook keeper. A short introduction:

"Another "works", after Zoo day, I have in my home where I am keeping and breeding about 40 reptile and amphibian species in private my collection, part of those are scientific cooperation with Russian wonderful herpetologists. Turtles and tortoises are very close of my heart and keeping and breeding those since 90s. My favourite is *Agrionemys horsfieldii* and breeding that since 1995. I am planning cooperation with Uzbekistan of study *Horsfieldii* in nature. That study connecting genetic and morphological study so we recognising captive animals better. My opinion is that main problem of breeding *Horsfieldii* in captivity is different genetic background and unknowing localities. Finding a key to

recognise captive specimen will be my main goal in next years with Horsfieldii and publishing that when ready, in Finnish book but in English too. I have spoken with Dr. Uwe Fritz and helping his genetic research with Horsfieldii starting from Uzbekistan. Because nature photography is one of my interests, I could photograph animals closely with DNA-samples. In situ work is very close of my heart. I have done ecological work in Finnish nature more than 15 years and working with some book project of reptiles and amphibians ecology in Finland."

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Tim Paasikunnas
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