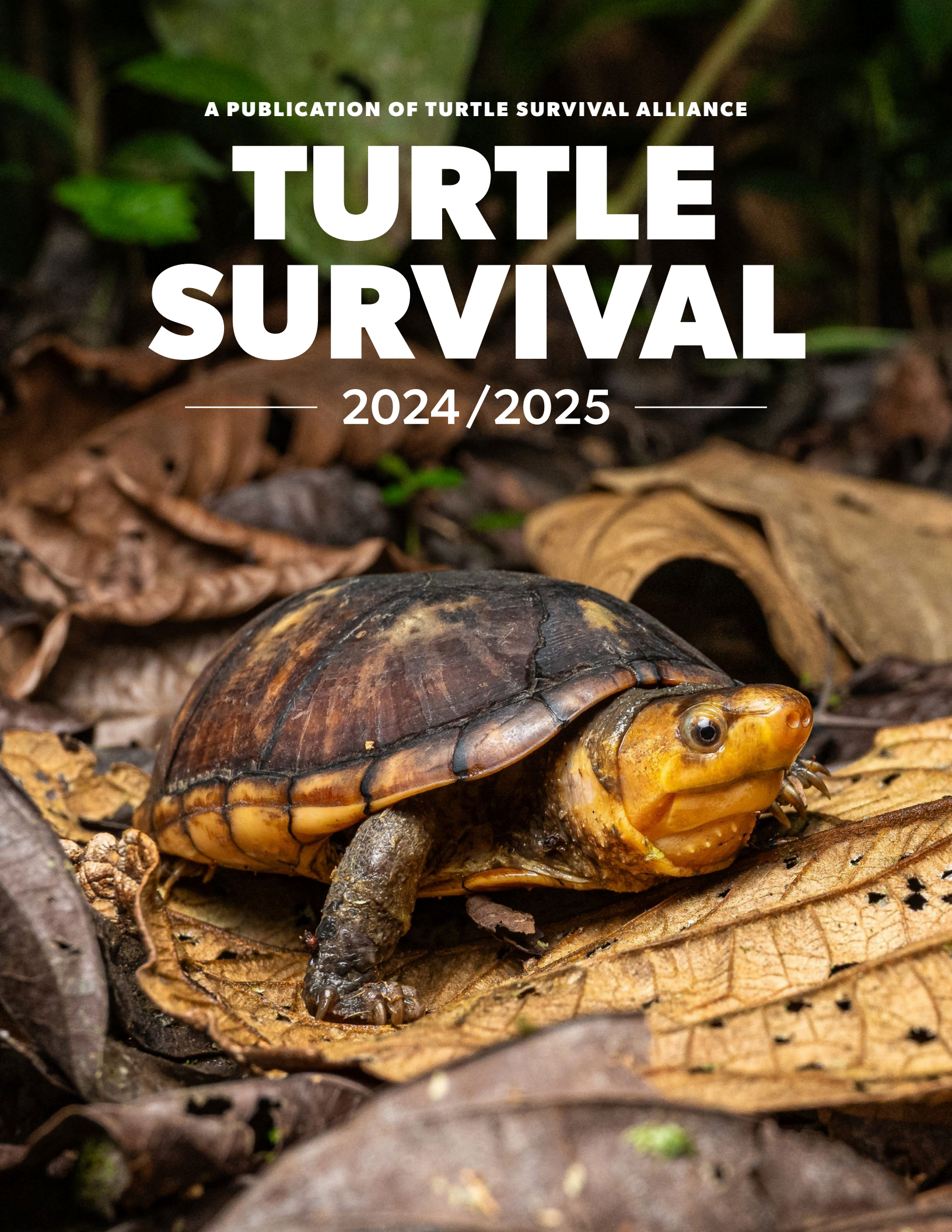


A PUBLICATION OF TURTLE SURVIVAL ALLIANCE

TURTLE SURVIVAL

— 2024/2025 —



From left: Arthur with a Suwannee Alligator Snapping Turtle (*Macrochelys suwanniensis*) on the Suwannee River, Florida, while attending a previous TSA/TFTSG annual symposium; Arthur in the field in Papua New Guinea working with the Piku Team (now Piku Biodiversity Network).



Behler Turtle Conservation Award 2025

Prestigious Award Honors Arthur Georges

by **MICHAEL B. THOMSON, DEBORAH S. BOWER, AND ANDERS G.J. RHODIN**

The 20th annual Behler Turtle Conservation Award in 2025 honored and celebrated Arthur Georges for his research in wildlife conservation and turtle recovery efforts.

Growing up near Brisbane, Australia, Arthur spent his early years on a rural property surrounded by a range of reptile and amphibian-friendly habitats. He spent much of that time searching for frogs and reptiles, to the consternation of his parents, as many were quite venomous. His interests extended well into his teens; an older cousin had a large collection of turtles, so Arthur asked his father to build him a pond, and he was ultimately proud to have more pet turtles than any other kid in the area.

Arthur was a quiet child, a dreamer who did poorly at most subjects in school, and was hopeless at sports. He was fortunate to be given a book, *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle, by his uncle visiting from America. This introduction to science fiction was transformational; it led to others by Robert A. Heinlein, Arthur C. Clarke (who he met in Sri Lanka as a teenager), and Isaac Asimov. Asimov was a prolific writer of science texts and popular accounts which the young Arthur devoured—by the age of 14, he decided to be a scientist.

He completed a degree in mathematics and physics at the University of Queensland. His fascination with nature, reptiles, and turtles, was regarded more as a hobby. How-

Anders Rhodin

ever, this changed when his father and Canadian physicist Harry Messel arranged for him to participate on a crocodile research project in Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory. This was herpetology at its best and opened his eyes to the idea that herpetology could be a career. On the one hand, he could be a mathematician in a desk job; on the other hand, he could follow an exciting career in the outdoors following a passion that had consumed him from a young age. Slam dunk decision.

After he finished his math degree, he did an extra year of zoology and enrolled in an honours year in reptile physiology. When in Arnhem Land, he had met Grahame Webb who led the crocodile program and who had worked on thermoregulation in reptiles. The evening discussions were inspiring, and Arthur chose to do his honours research on head-body thermal gradients in reptiles. He went on to a PhD in zoology working on the freshwater turtles of Fraser Island in Queensland. There he met and was inspired by both John Legler and Peter Pritchard. He teamed up with Peter Baverstock and Mark Adams to complement morphological taxonomy with molecular systematics, and with John Cann, who generously shared his exceptional knowledge of freshwater turtles and their diversity to guide field sampling—work that continues to this day.

On completion of his PhD, Arthur secured a position with Canberra College of Advanced Education and moved with his wife Glenda from sunny Queensland to chilly Canberra. In his academic position, he led projects on freshwater turtles in Australia and New Guinea: natural history of the Eastern Long-necked Turtle (*Chelodina longicollis*), sex determination in the Pig-nosed Turtle (*Carettochelys insculpta*), ecology of the Northern Snake-necked Turtle (*Chelodina rugosa*), and chelid phylogeography. He mentored several students who have excelled in turtle work, including Rod Kennett, Sean Doody, John Roe, Deb Bower, Kate Hodges, Carla Eisemberg, Erika Alacs, Damien Fordham, Scott Thomson, Yolarnie Amepou, and Bruno Ferronato.

Arthur has also contributed strategic research to underpin conservation efforts on threatened species, including the critically endangered Bellinger River Turtle (*Myuchelys georgesi*), named in his honor. He served on the Scientific Committee of the ACT Government to provide expert advice on the listing of threatened species and led the expert assessment of freshwater turtles under Australia's Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act. He was instrumental in the formulation of the policy by the Australian Society of Herpetologists to deal with taxonomic vandalism and the establishment of the Official List of Australian Species of Amphibians and Reptiles. He led a project on wildlife utilization by Indigenous communities in Arnhem Land centered on the Northern Snake-necked Turtle to assist them in engaging their youth in culturally

meaningful activities. He secured funding for a program on environmental education and community-led conservation in Papua New Guinea, and was instrumental in the establishment of the Piku Biodiversity Network there, now under national leadership to undertake and facilitate conservation work, and still serves on its board. Arthur has also been a co-author of recent editions of *Turtles of the World: Annotated Checklist and Atlas of Taxonomy, Synonymy, Distribution, and Conservation Status*, produced by the Turtle Taxonomy Working Group, which provides leadership on the often complex recommendations about which taxa are considered valid.

Arthur feels privileged to have been able to follow the career path he has. To combine work with one's passion in life is special. His teaching in statistics and wildlife biology is filled with turtle examples providing real-world context to learning. Working with students at all levels has been a never-ending source of inspiration and has smoothed the passage of his life and career with youthful enthusiasm, novel ideas, unexpected twists and turns, revelations and discoveries that one person on their own could not hope to achieve. The support of mentors and collaborators on the journey has been invaluable, especially those who exhibit infectious enthusiasm, meticulous attention to detail, and dedication in their work to better understand the world around us and the animals that live in it. He loves turtles, and we honor and celebrate his contributions to understanding and preserving these special animals. 🐢





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