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Turtle Poetry

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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 — This section is devoted to poetry involving turtles, representing either reprinted previously published or new unpublished material.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 at Chelonian Research Foundation [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 man 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 man's use of the turtle for sustenance, others will stress man's 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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FALLEN GIANTS

MARK SUMMERS[1]

''Big-is-always-better'', notably so when picking fruit
If fruit is giant tortoise big, picking's awfully sweet
And so it went for the behemoth isolationists
When they met Man on voyage of exploration
Or should that be voyage of exploitation
Seychelles, Galapagos, Mauritius all 'discovered'
And all held creeps of prehistoric laggards
Dilly-dallying browser/grazers that could but crawl
Their comedown, though, was not a question of speed
Rather, their culinary value; stowed away, ever ready
Viande fraîche to be served up on some distant wave
Or rich tribute to he who got castaway on their isle
Their isle, found, became routine port of call
Their plenty became our plenty; while it lasted
Twenty Indian Ocean giants down to just one wild
Capable of an inning we humans but dream of
Yet we cut theirs horribly short
Leaving but a few spent shells
Emptied of existence.

But one example:
Cylindraspis inepta
Saddle-backed Mauritius Giant Tortoise
Extinct ca. early 1700s
Mauritius, Indian Ocean

BEAT THAT!

MARK SUMMERS[1]

Biggest, fastest, furthest-travelling, deepest-diving
Heavyweight champion of the sea-turtle tank
Twelve hundred pound meandering behemoth
Butterfly buoyant floater; sting-resistant prizefighter
Built on the backs of many a medusan corpse
Built with bony plate-embedded rubbery wetsuit
Taking, and surviving, nearly-Polar-Bear-dips
Spied from Norwegian north to antipodeans' Kiwi south
Wafting a wingspan greater than Wandering Albatross
Bravely battling on while the dinosaurs collapsed
And now faced with Man, the fiercest enemy of them all
Rookeries raped throughout Malaysia: *gutted!*
Eggs snatched before the *Big Dule* might restock
Mortal struggles lost to the longliner's ravening hook
Lives forfeit to the driftnet's take-all death chamber
High Seas under threat from boat-bound highwaymen
Great Pacific Garbage Patch spinning lethal deceit
Plastic deceiving you as jellyfish lookalike treat
Luth, you're swimming against a strengthening tide
Tide of 'incidental' loss, tide of blatant desecration
Time for me, *Everyman*, to stop and think
And decide, should you swim or sink?

Dermochelys coriacea
Leatherback, Luth, Trunkback Turtle
Extant: 26,000 – 43,000 nesting females
Status: critically endangered
Cosmopolitan: tropical to sub-polar seas

Editorial Comment. — These poems arrived by email one day—as so many now do—testament to the passion and personal needs of so many to express themselves in poetry when describing the plight of turtles. I've walked that path myself, composing several poems to celebrate and capture the essence of turtles and their need for preservation and protection. The author, a scientist like so many of us, has reached into his inner space to find and express beauty and rhythm in the poetic description of these inspiring animals. The inspiration and passion shown by people like him is inspiration in itself. Would that there were more of us in the world who lament the loss of species and the natural world—would that there were more of us to stand up for the preservation and protection of species and habitats, and to fight for the survival of our natural world and all its beauty and diversity. Would that the rest of the world felt as we do…

[1] Both poems composed March 2009.

Submitted 27 July 2009 as part of a pre-publication poetry book on the Sixth Extinction.
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