

# TURTLE POETRY

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*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— This section is devoted to poetry involving turtles, representing either reprinted previously published or new unpublished material.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 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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## In Honor of Russell A. Mittermeier on Receiving the Behler Turtle Conservation Award<sup>1</sup>

ANDERS G.J. RHODIN

Thank you Russ, my dear old friend  
for all that you are, and all that you do  
and for all the inspiration you always extend

For fifty years now our friendship has grown  
beginning at Dartmouth and our Amazon days  
with primates and turtles guiding our way

With Tarzan in your heart and jungle in your soul  
you've inspired us all to follow our dreams  
and always to nurture our love of the wild

From the MCZ to CI, and your leadership role  
describing new turtles, and forging an alliance  
while sharing a vision, our strong common goal

Leader among leaders, and hero for the planet  
extraordinary creator of protected wild places  
conservation rock star and champion of species  
hotspots, megadiversity, and wilderness areas

There from the start, setting the stage  
founding our Specialist Group, forming the base  
then focusing your efforts on growing the rest  
helping to create the TSA, TCF, and MBZ  
joining forces with the TC and then GWC

We honor you now with the Behler Award  
a fitting prelude to the great Indy Prize  
we honor you now, my dear old friend  
for all that you are, and all that you do  
and for all the inspiration you always extend.

*Editorial Comment.* — I wrote this poem to honor my longtime best old friend and colleague, Russ Mittermeier, on the occasion of him receiving the Behler Turtle Conservation Award, just ahead of also being awarded the prestigious Indianapolis Prize. Russ and I began our friendship in 1968 at Dartmouth College as classmates with dorm rooms across from each other, and traveled together through Central and South America in 1971 after graduation, exploring the Amazon and developing our dreams of studying primates and turtles. We worked together first at the Museum of Comparative Zoology (MCZ), from where Russ headed off briefly to World Wildlife Fund-US and then became President at Conservation International (CI) for 25 years. He helped create our IUCN/SSC Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group and was instrumental in also helping to found the Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA), the Turtle Conservation Fund (TCF), and the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund (MBZ), eventually also joining the board of the Turtle Conservancy (TC) and finally a new staff position at Global Wildlife Conservation (GWC). In all these endeavors and organizations he and I worked well together for the benefit of turtles and their preservation and protection. More than just a true and close friend, Russ has also been a professional colleague, frequent co-author on turtle papers, conservation mentor, guide, and inspiration, and always helped facilitate my own interests in turtles, despite my heading off on a primary career in medicine and orthopedic surgery. He kept me connected and helped foster my second parallel career in turtle research and conservation, and for that I will always be eternally grateful. He has also been like family, serving as Godfather for my son Michael and Best Man when I married Carol Conroy. He has been one of the five most important mentors in my life, including my Dad, Johannes, Ernest Williams at the MCZ, Peter Pritchard, and John Behler. I thank him for all he has done for me and for turtles and global conservation in general. He is a true Hero for the Planet.

<sup>1</sup> Composed in Arlington, Vermont, 10 August 2018.

Read at the Behler Turtle Conservation Award Ceremony, Fort Worth, Texas, 15 August 2018.