



The First Spotted Turtle Awakens

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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 — This section is devoted to poetry involving turtles, representing either reprinted previously published or new unpublished material.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, 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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The First Spotted Turtle Awakens¹

JACQUELINE D. LITZGUS

The sun glistens
reflected from the black of a wet carapace
recently emerged from the water
to gather all of the heat
this early Spring day has to offer.

I watch and ponder
the pinpoint of light are dazzling
complementing your distinctive yellow spots
interrupting the black continuum
like stars in an impenetrable night sky.

A head extends
revealing brilliant orange patches.
Your scaled limbs emerge
from your protective form, unchanged for ages
to sparkle like crystals in granite.

How many Springs
have those orange-flecked eyes gazed upon?
How many times
have you surveyed this scene?

Groggy still from Winter's chill
lingering in the early morning.
Yet you have made the migration
from your winter refuge, driven by an innate force
to await the coming
of the rest of your species.

A courtship waltz
has been danced at this pond
every Spring since the humans came.
As the roads encroached
and the dwellings followed
you have been a player
in the generations of your own that have and will come.

Pray the roads don't come too close!
Pray the dwellings are not built upon your home!
Pray they don't come to pack you into boxes and crates!

Bask upon your hummock
until the others come
to join the Dance;
A Dance to celebrate life.
Revel in the present pristine beauty.

As your shell dries and you blend in with the dry leaves
that will bloom green in a few short weeks,
I stand aside and watch
and hope that forever
you will remain here untouched.

Editorial Comment. — This lovely poem about spotted turtles (*Clemmys guttata*) emerging to bask in a southern Canadian wetland was written by Jackie Litzgus back in 1998. When I chose it for inclusion in this issue, I asked her about it, and she responded: "I wrote that poem while thinking about heading to my long-term study site to conduct my annual survey, and I was thinking about one wetland in particular where the spotted turtles had been monitored since 1977. I have been surveying that site every year since 1991. Interestingly (and to my great disappointment!), that wetland has undergone substantial succession since 1998 when I wrote the poem, and I no longer find spotted turtles there. It is quite amazing to think of all of the things that have happened since 1998!" Jackie is now a renowned biology professor at Laurentian University in Ontario, where she is teaching and training the next generation of ecologists and conservationists. May they all learn and benefit from her passionate approach to her field of endeavor. On a personal note, the first wild turtles I ever observed and collected were two beautiful spotted turtles basking on hummocks in a small wetland in Carlisle, Massachusetts, on a sunny chilly early spring morning in the early 1970s. I have never forgotten the experience or the brilliant beauty of those turtles.

¹ Composed 25 April 1998.

Submitted by Jacqueline D. Litzgus.