

## 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— This section is devoted to poetry involving turtles, representing either reprinted previously published or new unpublished material.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<sup>1</sup>

“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<sup>1</sup>

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: *guttled!*  
Eggs snatched before the *Big Dule* might restock  
Mortal struggles lost to the longliner's ravaging 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...

<sup>1</sup> 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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