



Graz, 6th March 2023

PRESSRELEASE – Turtle Island | Peter Praschag

Small turtle - big time

Another world-first breeding success at Turtle Island

Since the beginning of Turtle Island, one of our primary goals has been to ensure the survival of endangered turtle species through captive breeding programs. Turtle Island has been successful in breeding more than 170 different species, including numerous world-first breeding achievements, regularly breeding 35 of the top 50 most endangered species, and successfully breeding 14 of the top 19 most endangered species, including 3 species that have already become extinct in their natural habitats. This is the most prestigious prize that can be bestowed upon an institution of this kind, and it highlights, once more, the significance of Turtle Island in terms of the protection of species and the maintenance of biodiversity. The data presented here speaks for itself: in 2022, 447 turtles of 63 different species hatched, and 10 of those species were among the top 25 with the highest level of endangerment.

The world's first breeding of the Vallarta mud turtle (*Kinosternon vogti*) took place in the greenhouse of Torsten Blanck, the Zoological Director of the Turtle Island at Deutschlandsberg, on February 8, 2023. There were 3 hatchlings of this species of turtle, which is the tiniest species in the world, and they are in great health despite being only 2 centimeters long. The species was only formally described for the first time in 2018, but it is already believed to be in grave danger of going extinct. Not only is it the tiniest of all known turtle species, with a maximum size of about 10 centimeters, but it can only be found in the metropolitan area of Puerto Vallarta, which is Mexico's second most popular tourist attraction. Urgent action is required as soon as possible since the remaining habitats of this highly visible species are in danger of being destroyed by the spread

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of urbanization. Since 2022, the parents have been residing on Turtle Island, and there is evidence that they have already produced offspring there in the very first year.

In addition to the successful breeding, a team from Turtle Island was able to successfully prevent an endangered species from being run over by successfully erecting a turtle protection fence in the only occurrence area of the species in the middle of February 2023, in close cooperation with the University of Guadalajara (Mexico). Additional on-site protection measures, such as a conservation breeding station that will be constructed in collaboration with the local authorities, are currently in the process of being developed. At the moment, we are making a concerted effort to secure sponsors for this initiative.

"We are quite proud of our newest members," said Peter Praschag. "I have high hopes that we will be successful in actively preventing the extinction of the world's smallest species of turtle by utilizing the steps that are being taken locally as well as the breeding project that is being conducted in Graz. We are not finished seeking for those who are interested in supporting this endeavor. Turtle Island encourages anyone who is curious to get in touch with us."

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Photographers: Torsten Blank, Peter Praschag, Joel Sartore



TURTLE ISLAND – at a glance

World's largest and most species-rich turtle conservation breeding station

Category A Zoo

Scientific institute & research facility

Animal shelter & sanctuary

Turtle Island in Figures

- Founded in **2013** by Dr. Peter Praschag (internationally recognized scientist and zoologist)
- Comprised of **4** scientifically recognized centers, located in Austria
- Approximately **2500** turtle specimens in total
- Home of **270** of the **360+** turtle taxa on the planet
- We house **37** of the **50** most endangered turtle species
- Home of approx. **90%** of the turtles within the two most endangered genera worldwide (*Batagur* & *Cuora*)
- Successful conservation breeding of more than **170** species
- **Six** of these species were the world's first captive-bred successes
- Successful breeding of **three** species that are already extinct in the wild

WE ARE

- a recognized scientific institution, research facility, and zoo, focusing on the conservation and breeding of the world's most endangered and overlooked turtle species
- a CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) certified institution (registration number AT033)
- a research station for the taxonomy and biology of turtles, with a focus on reproductive biology and ecology
- Austria's only official shelter and sanctuary for confiscated or unwanted turtles
- an European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) studbook keeper for 11 turtle species
- facilitators of in-situ reintroduction projects (e.g., Vienna Zoo and other internationally renowned zoos and research stations)
- public awareness advocates and educators for species conservation