

# 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— This section is devoted to poetry involving turtles, representing either reprinted previously published or new unpublished material.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 at 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.

*Chelonian Conservation and Biology*, 2011, 10(2): 294

## The Problem of Describing Chelonians<sup>1</sup>

MATTHEW GODFREY AND LISA CAMPBELL

The moonlight glistens on the imbricated scutes  
and we revel.  
Tears run down her face  
clearing sand flung up by her flippers  
desperate to dig. Likewise, the tears  
of the flatback.

This ancient lineage, this unique beast.  
And the turtle danced. No.  
The turtle rocked.  
No. There are limits to saying  
in language, what the turtle did.

It is sometimes good for poetry to elude us.  
*Swim with the ancient mariner. Oh, I will.*  
Leatherbacks doing something on the beach.

*Editorial Comment.* — One of my favorite endeavors for each issue of CCB is to select a poem for the turtle poetry page. Ever since we started this feature it has been a constant source of enjoyment and interaction with various people—both accomplished and renowned poets as well as skilled amateurs and turtle lovers expressing themselves in the poetic medium. The poem selected here is a direct outcome of one of those interactions—a friendly discussion several years ago between myself and Matthew Godfrey over what constituted “good” versus “bad” poetry in my previous selection process. We disagreed mildly about what had been good or not, and I suggested he try his hand at writing his own piece. The eventual outcome was excellent and light-hearted, as well as gently poking some welcome fun at other more serious poems we have published. I thank him and Lisa for their wonderful effort and it gives me great pleasure to finally publish it here on this page. I also asked Matthew to write a short editorial introduction to the poem, and he did: “In true good spirit, Anders issued a challenge during a chat at a sea turtle meeting several years ago: write your own and submit it. This was in response to my comment that it seemed like every poem in CCB was more serious than the last, and certainly there should be room for some lighter, less ponderous poems about turtles (for some lovely fun turtle poems, see *Celebrate the Sea: poetry written by 4–11 year olds*, published by the UK Marine Conservation Society—one of our favorites is ‘In the Ocean’, by Chloe Adcock at age 7, page 59). Many months went by without thinking more about it, until one day Lisa and I were inspired after reading a poem written by Robert Haas that captured the levity that may often embody the act of composing poetry. We are grateful to Anders for both challenging us and being receptive to the outcome.”

<sup>1</sup> Composed 2005 in Québec, Canada;  
“Shamelessly influenced by a poem by Robert Haas  
published in the *New Yorker* in June 2005.” — Matthew Godfrey.