

P.O.V.

Discussion Guide

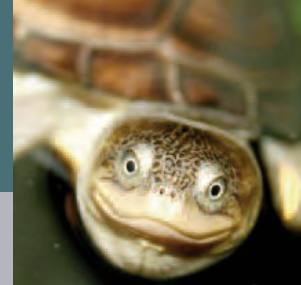
Season **20**

The Chances of the World Changing

A Film by Eric Daniel Metzgar & Nell Carden Grey



www.pbs.org/pov



Letter from the Filmmakers



Director Eric Daniel Metzgar
Photo Todd Chalfant



Filmmaker Nell Carden Grey
Photo Gummi Brynjarsson

New York, 2007

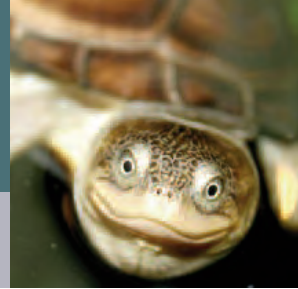
Dear Colleague,

For a few months in 2003, Richard Ogust's story was everywhere — on television, in newspapers, in magazines and on the web. He had been dubbed "the turtle guy"...the man who was sharing his apartment with 1,200 turtles, most of them endangered. Unsurprisingly, most of the reports treated Richard's situation as mere spectacle, newsworthy only because of its peculiarity. But when we read about Richard, we were drawn to him for other reasons.

At the top of the list of our countless queries, we had one principal question for Richard: *What makes you care so much?* We soon realized that the answer was unspeakable, and concluded that the most effective means of exploring the source of Richard's compassion was to observe him.

The shooting days were exciting, as we were in the presence of two vast forces. The first was the turtles themselves. These dinosaur-like creatures seem to dwell in two places- prehistory and the fragile present. Looking on them with modern eyes, in square, heated rooms, we felt both gratitude and shame. The second force was Richard himself, whose energy and perpetual sense of awe astounded us.

The conservation of endangered species is an overwhelming and complex undertaking that will require the concerted physical and mental labor of a team of deeply caring global citizens over the course of several generations. We consider Richard one of the test pilots of this great mission. Observing his struggles deepened our perception of the thick personal, political and economic barriers that stand between the intention and the realization of saving our planet's disappearing species. But we also realized that there is reason for hope.



Letter from the Filmmakers

It is far too easy to talk of extinction using a series of leaden adjectives. Extinction, of course, has tragic meaning, but the manner of one's attempts to prevent extinction bears no such tragedy. In fact, a film about extinction is really a study of its opposing force: survival.

When one is faced with immeasurable responsibility, an excess of strength, not gloom, powers the day. And that strength, again and again, in the face of all obstacles, is what we filmed. We hope audiences will be, as we are, inspired by Richard's efforts.



Richard Ogust with director Eric Daniel Metzgar.
Photo Noe Venable

Eric Daniel Metzgar and Nell Carden Grey

Filmmakers, *The Chances of the World Changing*

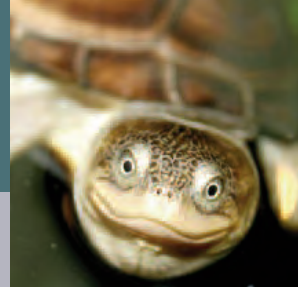


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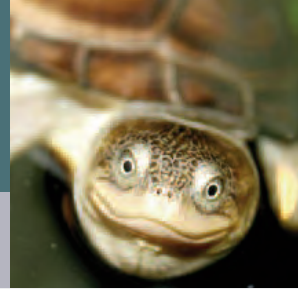
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Introduction

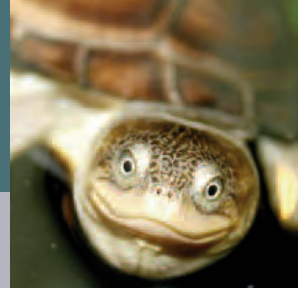


Diamondback turtle.
Photo Arthur Gorniak

A decade ago, after an epiphany at a New York restaurant, Richard Ogust began dedicating his time and resources to rescuing endangered turtles, confiscating hundreds bound for Southeast Asian food markets. When the filmmakers catch up with the 50-year-old writer, he is sharing his Manhattan loft with 1,200 turtles, including five species extinct in the wild. But his growing “ark” and preservation efforts are threatening to exhaust him, both mentally and financially.

The Chances of the World Changing, a feature-length (82-minute) documentary, follows Richard over two years,

chronicling the rewards and frustrations of being passionate about a cause. That Richard, as an activist, struggles to save not only hundreds of animals, but also his own life makes this film a rich outreach tool. Audiences will learn as much about activism itself as about the struggles to save an endangered species.



Background Information

Turtles Under Threat

Turtles are native to every continent except Antarctica. Although the number of different species is relatively small (301), there is a great deal of variation within species. Turtles have adapted to live in almost every climate and region of the world, from deserts to forests, freshwater creeks to oceans, and nearly every kind of habitat in between.

The adaptability of turtles has not insulated them from the threat of extinction. Twenty-eight percent of known species face significant threats, due to two primary causes: harvesting in the wild and the destruction of natural habitats. As many as half of all species are at some degree of risk. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which tracks species facing extinction threats, lists 19 turtle species as critically endangered. Among those facing less severe threats, thirty-three are classified as endangered and thirty-two as vulnerable.

Harvesting for use by humans (as food, for medicinal purposes, or for sale as pets) is the greatest threat to turtle species in Asia, while the destruction of habitat is of greater concern in most other regions of the world.

The turtle trade in Asia drew substantial media attention in the late 1990s and early 2000s. As trade barriers were lifted and rising prosperity boosted the demand for turtles in China, providers in Southeast Asia greatly increased the number of turtles harvested and shipped there. Traffic, an organization that monitors trade in animals for the World Wildlife Fund, estimates that more than 240 tons of turtles were exported from Vietnam to China in the mid-1990s, and two to four tons were shipped from Cambodia each day.

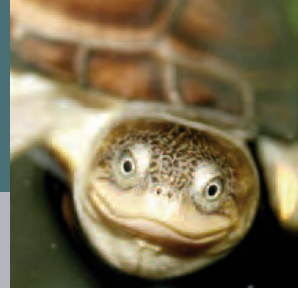
As a result, wildlife populations were significantly diminished, and researchers reported difficulty finding specimens in the wild. Most of the turtles imported into China were sold in large public markets, which prompted an international outcry against trade in endangered animals. While increased international cooperation and restrictions have decreased the extent of this trade, poaching continues throughout the region.



Inside Richard Ogust's penthouse sanctuary in Manhattan.

Photo Noe Venable

Another significant threat in Asia is the popularity of turtles as pets in Japan, where more than 30,000 animals were being imported annually, according to a 2005 report by Traffic. The bulk of this trade consisted of three species: the central Asian tortoise, the African spurred tortoise and the leopard tortoise.



Background Information



*Richards Ogust looks out of the future home of the
Tewksbury Institute of Herpetology*

Photo Eric Daniel Metzgar

Possibilities for Protection

The Turtle Conservation Fund, a partnership between IUCN and Conservation International's Center for Applied Diversity Science, has focused on assurance colonies as part of its overall strategy for protecting threatened turtle species. Assurance colonies preserve species in captivity while conservation efforts continue in the wild. Conservationists are also boosting biological research efforts to track species and coordinating further international efforts to enforce and augment the current protection regulations.

In addition, some conservationists have proposed that commercial turtle farms could satisfy the demand for turtle meat and other animal products. Others oppose this strategy, claiming that turtle farms themselves have become the biggest customers of the illegal trade in wild turtles, in part to satisfy the ongoing growth in demand for turtles, and in part to increase the stability of farm populations by introducing breeding variety.

Such debates over strategy are an indication of increasing scrutiny of turtle populations. While the threat to turtle species

— freshwater turtles in particular — is severe, international conservation efforts have never been greater.

Sources:

"A Global Action Plan for Conservation of Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles."

The Turtle Conservation Fund. 2002.

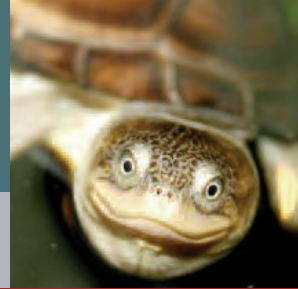
http://www.seaturtle.org/PDF/author/TCF_2002_ActionPlan.pdf

"Japan's Role as the World's Leading Importer of Live Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles as Pets Needs Assessing, Conservationists Say." *Traffic*, the Wildlife Trade Monitoring Network. March 9, 2005.

"Though Sturdy Survivors, Turtles Prove to Be Ill Equipped for Human Threat." *Angier, Natalie. The New York Times*. December 12, 2006.

"Turtle Farms Threaten Rare Species, Experts Say." *Fish Farmer Magazine*. United Kingdom. March 30, 2007. http://www.fishfarmer-magazine.com/news/-fullstory.php/aid/993/Turtle_farms_threaten_rare_species_experts_say.html

"Saving the Earth's Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles." Turtle Conservation Fund. Conservation International. http://www.conservation.org/xp/news/-press_releases/2003/turtle_kit/turtlebrochure.pdf



General Discussion Questions

Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen. If the mood seems tense, you can pose a general question and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion.

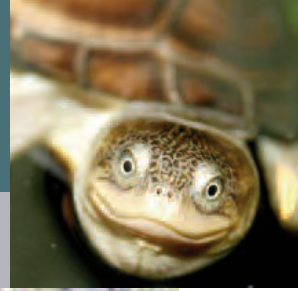
Unless you think participants are so uncomfortable that they can't engage until they have had a break, don't encourage people to leave the room between the film and the discussion. If you save your break for an appropriate moment during the discussion, you won't lose the feeling of the film as you begin your dialogue.

One way to get a discussion going is to pose a general question, such as:

- **If you could ask Richard Ogust a single question, what would you ask and why?**
- **If a friend asked you what this film was about, what would you tell them?**
- **What do you think you will remember about this film two months from now? What is it about that thing or scene that strikes you as especially memorable?**
- **What insights or inspiration did you gain from this film? What did you learn about the film's subjects or about yourself?**



*Eric Daniel Metzgar checks out the turtles in Richard Ogust's Manhattan loft.
Photo Noe Venable*



Discussion Prompts



Five turtles.

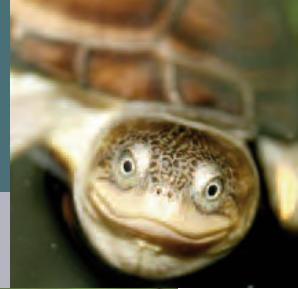
Photo Eric Daniel Metzgar

Activism

- How would you describe Richard Ogust? Do you consider him to be a role model or hero? Why or why not?
- For an activist (no matter the cause), what are the lessons to be learned from Richard's experience?
- As Bill receives some of Richard's turtles, he observes that, "it doesn't take anybody special. You just have to care." What issues or causes do you care about? How do you demonstrate that care?
- What is the significance of the film's title, ***The Chances of the World Changing***? In your view, what are the chances? What can you do to increase the chances?

Humans, Animals and Responsibility

- In your view, what obligations do humans have to protect animals or prevent the extinction of species? What are the sources of your beliefs about the ethical treatment of animals?
- Bill says, "There's an evolution in one's own mind when you start taking care of animals." Have you ever cared for an animal? How did it affect you?
- Richard says that he wanted to prove that his work with turtles wasn't just a personal obsession with collecting, but rather "had some value to it." How would you describe the value in Richard's work?
- How does the story of this film reflect the larger story of what's happening in our world?



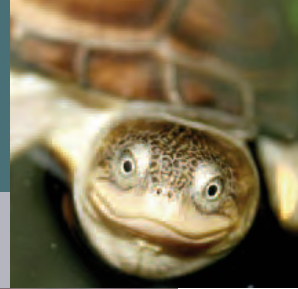
Discussion Prompts

Conservation Policy

- Richard acknowledges that he can't release the turtles he breeds, so he just tries to keep them alive for another fifty or a hundred years until "the world changes enough to let them loose." Cris (one of the men who accepts some of Richard's turtles) says, "it's a double-edged sword...extinction is a part of life," but he also notes that human activity is accelerating the extinction process for a lot of animals. If a species cannot survive in the wild, should humans try to keep it going in captivity? Why or why not?
- How would you resolve tensions between cultural traditions that involve killing turtles and the possibility that those traditions could lead to the extinction of a species?
- How would you resolve tensions between people who rely on turtles for food and those who are working to preserve turtle populations?
- Rather than supporting Richard's efforts, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection seems to be an obstacle. Whose interests are served by these kinds of government actions? What are the pros and cons of government regulation of private collectors?
- Why do you think the task of preserving turtles has fallen into the hands of people like Richard, i.e., private collectors? In your view, should the government step in to help out? Why or why not?



Turtles swimming in water.
Photo Noe Venable



Taking Action



- Find out what types of turtles or tortoises live in your region and whether any are on the threatened species list (www.iucnredlist.org). Work with others to join or start community-wide initiatives to protect local turtle populations.
- Hold a fund-raiser for a conservation organization (see the “Resources” section for possible organizations).
- Explore religious or cultural teachings about what constitutes ethical treatment of animals. Share what you learn with your congregation, club, neighbors or civic group.
- Bill says, “It would be nice to have one giant institute that could take care of everything and it’s called the world...” Investigate what kinds of policies exist or need to exist to ensure that “the world” could “take care of everything.” Meet with policy-makers to discuss related legislation.

The filmmakers attend a turtle conference in Florida.
Photo courtesy of “The Chances of the World Changing”



Resources

FILM-RELATED WEB SITES

Original Online Content on P.O.V. Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)

P.O.V.'s *The Chances of the World Changing* Web site
www.pbs.org/pov/chancesoftheworld

The Chances of the World Changing companion Web site offers a streaming video trailer of the film, an interview with filmmakers Eric Daniel Metzgar and Nell Carden Grey (video, podcast and text); a list of related Web sites, organizations and books; a downloadable discussion guide and classroom activity; and the following special feature:

VIDEO INTERVIEW - THE "ASIAN TURTLE CRISIS"

Richard Ogust and the other turtle conservationists featured in the film were reacting to the rapid and widespread decline of freshwater turtle and tortoise species in Southeast Asia, a phenomenon collectively known as the "Asian Turtle Crisis." In this exclusive online interview, filmmaker Eric Daniel Metzgar walks the Reptile Hall at the Museum of Natural History in New York City with George Amato, the Director of Conservation Genetics, and asks him about the crisis.

Conservation

THE WORLD CONSERVATION UNION
www.iucn.org

The World Conservation Union's Web site features information on a wide variety of turtle conservation issues and initiatives. They also host a companion Web site, www.iucnredlist.org that is the most up-to-date list of the world's threatened species.

TRAFFIC
www.traffic.org

The Web site of the Wildlife Trade Monitoring Network is the central site for information on global trade and trafficking in wild plants and animals.

What's Your P.O.V.?

*P.O.V.'s online Talking Back Tapestry is a colorful, interactive representation of your feelings about **The Chances of the World Changing**.*

Listen to other P.O.V. viewers talk about the film and add your thoughts by calling 1-800-688-4768. www.pbs.org/pov/talkingback.html

CITES

www.cites.org/

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is an international agreement between governments that sets rules on trade in specimens of wild animals and plants. The Web site includes information on the law, a list of signatory countries and reports on compliance.

WORLD WILDLIFE FUND

www.wwf.org

The Web site for the World Wildlife Fund includes species fact sheets as well as reports on the status of endangered species and programs currently in place to help those species.

TURTLE SURVIVAL ALLIANCE

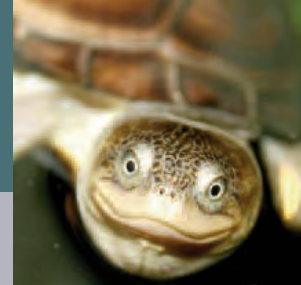
www.turtlesurvival.org

The Turtle Survival Alliance is a membership organization for people involved in sustainable captive management of freshwater turtles and tortoises. One of their conferences is featured in the film. The Web site reports on members' ongoing projects.

P.O.V.'S BORDERS: ENVIRONMENT

www.pbs.org/pov/borders/2004/talk/cs.html

P.O.V.'s online program *Borders: Environment* featured a field journal by marine biologist Carl Safina in which he describes his work on sea turtle conservation. The site also includes a variety of links to related environmental organizations.



Resources



Richard opens a new shipment of turtles from China.
Photo courtesy of "The Chances of the World Changing"

THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT OF 1973

www.fws.gov/endangered/esa.html

The Endangered Species Act regulates treatment of endangered species in the U.S. This site also provides a link to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Endangered Species Program.

TURTLES

NATURE: THE REPTILES: TURTLES AND TORTOISES

www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/reptiles/turtles_tales.html

The Web site for the PBS series *Nature's* episode on "The Reptiles: Turtles and Tortoises" is a good resource for general information on turtles.

ASIAN TURTLE CRISIS

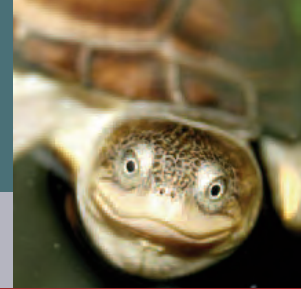
<http://nytts.org/asianturtlecrisis.html>

The Web site of the New York Turtle and Tortoise Society includes a rich set of links to articles on issues related to Asian turtles as well as links to related organizations. The site also includes graphic photos of the slaughter and marketing of turtles in China.

CALIFORNIA TURTLE AND TORTOISE CLUB

www.tortoise.org

On their Web site, members of the California Turtle and Tortoise Club have gathered a wide range of informational resources on turtles and tortoises, including articles, images and links to other regional or local clubs.



How to Buy the Film

To order *The Chances of the World Changing*, go to www.thechancesoftheworldchanging.com/frontpage.html



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and entering its 20th season on PBS, the award-

winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running series on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary-issue independent filmmakers. Airing Tuesdays at 10 p.m., June through October, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought over 250 award-winning documentaries to millions nationwide, and now has a Webby Award-winning online series, P.O.V.'s Borders. Since 1988, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information about P.O.V. is available online at www.pbs.org/pov.

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P.O.V. Community Engagement and Education

P.O.V. provides Discussion Guides for all films as well as curriculum-based P.O.V. Lesson Plans for select films to promote the use of independent media among varied constituencies. Available free online, these originally produced materials ensure the ongoing use of P.O.V.'s documentaries with educators, community workers, opinion leaders and general audiences nationally. P.O.V. also works closely with local public-television stations to partner with local museums, libraries, schools and community-based organizations to raise awareness of the issues in P.O.V.'s films.

P.O.V. Interactive

www.pbs.org/pov

P.O.V.'s award-winning Web department produces a Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, P.O.V.'s Borders. It also produces a Web site for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of P.O.V. films through community-based and educational applications, focusing on involving viewers in activities, information and feedback on the issues. In addition, www.pbs.org/pov houses our unique Talking Back feature, filmmaker interviews, viewer resources and information on the P.O.V. archives as well as myriad special sites for previous P.O.V. broadcasts.

American Documentary, Inc.

www.americandocumentary.org

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream-media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic-engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation.

Front cover: Side-necked turtle
Photo Andy Amsbaugh



The P.O.V. 20th Anniversary Collection is a limited-edition DVD collection produced in partnership with Docurama. The collection contains 15 titles reflecting the range and diversity of P.O.V. films, including the series' inaugural broadcast, *American Tongues*, by Louis Alvarez and Andrew Kolker.

Available at www.amdoc.org/shop.

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