

The Princess & The Tortoise



*How Princess Theodora von Liechtenstein
became an Environmental Activist*

BY THE GREEN TEEN TEAM FOUNDATION



When an idea met a pioneer princess...

This is a story about a young princess by the name of Theodora von Liechtenstein. She is 11 years old and lives in Italy and does all the things most 11-year-old girls do, like work hard in school and spend time with her family. But Theodora is not like all girls her age. Theodora is a pioneer. Two years ago, with the help of her mother Princess Astrid von Liechtenstein, Theodora started an organization called the Green Teen Team Foundation, with the mission to grow a network of projects aimed at educating teenagers around the world on the importance of environmental conservation and preserving the rich biodiversity of our planet. While some species will inevitably become extinct through the natural process of evolution, the importance of maintaining the natural balance and complexity of biodiversity in our ecosystems cannot be overstated. Theodora believes we can all

help our environment by making small changes in how we live and that forming good conservation habits when we're young is the best way to ensure the future health of our planet.

Many conservation projects aimed at young people highlight problems and issues in far away countries, which can make them seem irrelevant. The Green Teen Team brings conservation home, making young people aware of the threatened and endangered species of plants and animals in their own backyard. She subscribes to the adage "think globally, act locally." By connecting Green Teen Team membership groups with schools and conservation projects within each group's own community, teens can gain hands-on experience with conservation efforts right on their doorstep. Many educational systems do not incorporate the importance of biodiversity conservation in their curriculums so the Green Teen Team has developed a program called Research, Conservation and

Princess Theodora von Liechtenstein helps collect data on Radiated Tortoises (left) and shows off a cache of Greek Tortoise eggs (right).



PREVIOUS SPREAD: JOHN TENNIEL'S ILLUSTRATION FROM ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND ADAPTED BY MARY ANN FRASER

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Education to complement science curriculums in schools. This project and many others help turn normal local teenagers into "Green Teens," who learn to care about the threatened and endangered species in their own neighborhoods.

Projects are funded by a combination of donations, memberships, sponsorship, and merchandise sales. Funds raised are used to develop and establish new projects, support existing projects, and to subsidize school visits. The teenage years are such a vital time of life; it is a time when teens most need outlets for self-expression and to find ways to strengthen bonds with their friends, family, and in society at large. Their programs not only connect teens with nature and teach them good conservation practices, they also connect them with other teens in their communities, with both immediate and long-term effects.

Membership groups are geared toward young people ages 10 through 18 with the objective of helping them become more involved and build a portfolio of active volunteer conservation work. Each member records their progress and highlights their achievements and strengths as they



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become more aware of their own unique passions and interests. Their goal is to help young members become aware of their environment and to make informed decisions that will influence their futures and that of the planet, providing a solid foundation of scientific knowledge that they can carry through their lives and chosen careers.

The Chelonia Project in Verona, Italy, was developed to spread awareness of threatened species of European tortoises and turtles native to central and southern Europe. The garden was officially opened in October 2014 by Dame Jane Goodall, Dr. Johannes Fritz, Dr. Cesare Avesani, and Theodora's father, Prince Alexander von Liechtenstein. In collaboration with Parco Natura Viva, a conservation center that specializes in breeding rare and endangered species, the Chelonia Project houses Eastern Hermann's Tortoises (*Testudo hermanni boettgeri*), Western Hermann's Tortoises (*Testudo hermanni hermanni*), Greek Tortoises (*Testudo graeca*), Marginated Tortoises (*Testudo marginata*), and European Pond Turtles (*Emys obicularis*). There are now over 50 animals in the garden. The Green Teen Team membership group meets once a month to volunteer their help and assistance with not only the turtles in the Chelonia garden but with all the animals housed at Parco Natura Viva. There they learn how the animals survive in the wild and how humans can affect animals and the environments in which they live. Among the studies Parco Natura Viva has published are color preferences of Aldabra Giant Tortoises (*Geochelone gigantea*) and enclosure use and food preferences of Radiated Tortoises (*Astrochelys radiata*).

Theodora herself volunteers once a week, year round, to care for the Chelonia garden inhabitants, assisting in everything from cleaning the nursery and garden areas to helping with hibernation preparation and data collection such as counting, weighing, and checking microchips during the hibernation period. This work has been documented in a series of books about the Chelonia Project illustrated by Green Teen Team members and collaborating school students. The objective for the Chelonia Project in the next three to five

Princess Theodora and her parents, Prince Alexander and Princess Astrid von Liechtenstein with a Ploughshare Tortoise, at the Turtle Conservancy's Conservation Center in Ojai.

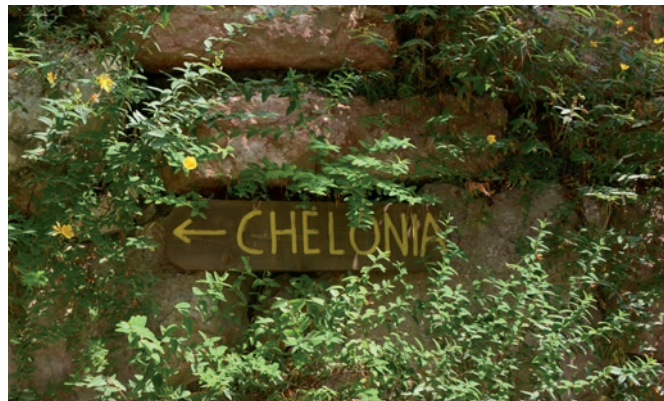


years is to successfully release suitable inhabitants from the Chelonia garden into their natural habitats in the wild. Working with the Italian Institute Superiore per la Protezione e la Ricerca Ambientale, they will use non-invasive methods to determine the health and suitability of animals born and raised in the Chelonia garden for introduction into the wild.

A recent satellite addition to the Chelonia Project was the collaboration with Fondazione Cetacea to sponsor the release and tracking of a Loggerhead Turtle (*Caretta caretta*) that had been rescued from the Adriatic, where it was suffering from being caught in a trawler net.

The Chelonia Project has worked with local schools in Bussolengo, Verona, Trieste, and Numana, using the tortoises and turtles as examples of species on the decline in the wild due to habitat destruction and invasive species. Tortoises and turtles are perfect tools for demonstrations to young people as they are accessible in all stages of development and have fantastic evolutionary history. Bringing children into contact with the animals is a great way to get the whole family involved.

This is just the beginning of the Green Teen Team Foundation story. They hope it continues to grow and evolve far into the future through a warm and welcoming organic process that has drawn many people, especially teenagers, to its programs and brought the organization to where it is today. 🌱



The Chelonia Project Garden provides a beautiful habitat, in which to study the animals, including the Greek Tortoises enjoying a lettuce snack (bottom).

Q & A with Theodora

Hello Theodora, can you tell me what the most important part of your foundation is for you?

For me, the most important part of Green Teen Team is that it allows me to help save the future of our planet and its biodiversity and to help others around my age do the same. It is really great to see so many people doing conservation work in other countries through Green Teen Team.

You are not even a teenager yet! Why do you think Green Teen Team is good for teenagers?

My hope is that Green Teen Team helps teenagers understand how important our environment and its natural biodiversity is, not only to animals but to us. Without our ecosystems we could not survive.

Would you rather be playing on your computer or chatting with friends than spending your time working with Green Teen Team?

Animals help me to relax, they help me stay calm—I just feel good around them. It makes me want to help all the animals in the world, and to make it easier for other people who enjoy being around animals to work with them. Working in the Chelonia Project makes me think about how lucky I am. But I also have a great time with my friends on Green Teen Team membership days and summer camps.

There is a lot of work involved in running Green Teen Team Foundation. Is there anyone helping you?

Yes of course! It would be too much for me to do on my own, as I still have to concentrate on schoolwork. I have a lot of help from Ellie [Crisp] who manages the day to day planning and coordination of new and existing Green Teen Team projects. I am so lucky to have Ellie because she considers my objectives and asks me to make the important decisions and choices about the direction of Green Teen Team so it is really my foundation! Without Ellie it would not be possible.

What does being a pioneer mean to you?

I don't actually feel like a pioneer—I am too young! But we are trying to do new and different things through Green Teen Team, which I hope are successful and influential. When I look back one day at the legacy of this organization, I will be proud to be considered a pioneer. 🌱

