

Raising awareness of endangered and vulnerable sea turtles

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When you think about dinosaurs, you see and imagine all the creatures that lived long ago and are now extinct, but what if I told you that you were wrong and that you just overlooked a very important sea creature...the turtle?

Sea turtles have been around for over 100 million years; they predate the last era of dinosaurs, and even though they don't amount to the size of an actual dinosaur, the rare leatherback sea turtle species can weigh up to as much as 2,000 pounds. This is the equivalent weight of a small car.

Now, the reason I tell you about this wonderful rare sea creature is that the leatherback is listed as endangered on the U.S. Federal Endangered Species Act, and that there are seven different species of sea turtles, six of which are either endangered or vulnerable. The seventh sea turtle species is the

flatback and it is only found in Australia and it cannot be evaluated because of insufficient information. While the Kemp's ridley sea turtle is on the brink of extinction, this sea turtle is classified as the most endangered. Then we have the olive ridley, that is known for having a nesting population in western North Atlantic that has decreased 80 percent since 1967. The hawksbill turtle has been listed as endangered on the Endangered Species Act since 1970 with no change, they no longer find them in large numbers anywhere. The green turtles have been an endangered species around the world since 1978. Finally, we have the loggerhead sea turtle, which nests in the U.S., and is commonly seen. However, this turtle has been listed as threatened on the Endangered Species Act since 1978.

I want to raise a very important question: "are sea turtles worth saving?" First, I want to point out that one of the main reasons sea turtles are on the brink of extinction is humans. We, humans, as a large population

have huge impacts on fisheries bycatch, coastal development, plastic pollution, and the one of the worst, the consumption of sea turtles and their eggs.

Fisheries Bycatch are considered as one of the greatest single threats, and it is estimated that since the 1950's over a million sea turtles have been captured with longlines, gill nets, and trawls which leads to death after entanglement.

Pollution is considered another huge threat because of plastics, discarded fishing gear, petroleum by-products, and chemical runoffs. These are all things that harm and kill sea turtles. Chemical pollutants weaken sea turtles' immune systems, making it easier for them to get diseases and die. Many leatherback sea turtles have died for ingesting plastics.

These are just a few of the many threats, but I want everyone to know that sea turtles play a vital role in two of our ecosystems, beaches and marine systems. Both of these ecosystems would be weakened if the

sea turtle were to go extinct, and the ocean is such an important source of food for humans. Sea turtles help control the jellyfish population. They are also sea grass bed grazers, which helps maintain a natural balance of fragile marine ecosystems. They also help control the population of sponges and coral reefs, which helps maintain a diversity of sea creatures.

I know that turtles are not as important as dogs and cats, but think about how overall, only one in 1,000 to 10,000 sea turtles will live to maturity. I believe that as a society, we should become more aware of what is happening to our planet and a perfect place to start is to raise awareness about sea turtle conservation and the marine ecosystems. It is important for everyone to be aware of how endangered these turtles are and what is causing their numbers to decrease. So please ask questions, do some research, adopt a sea turtle, donate, recycle, or learn about sea turtle-safe materials.

Something to think about...

In the mythology of India the survival of the sea turtle insures the survival of the world. The Indian myth states that the earth rests on the back of three elephants. These elephants in turn stand on the shell of a giant sea turtle which swims in an infinite sea. It is believed that if the sea turtle disappears the world will end.

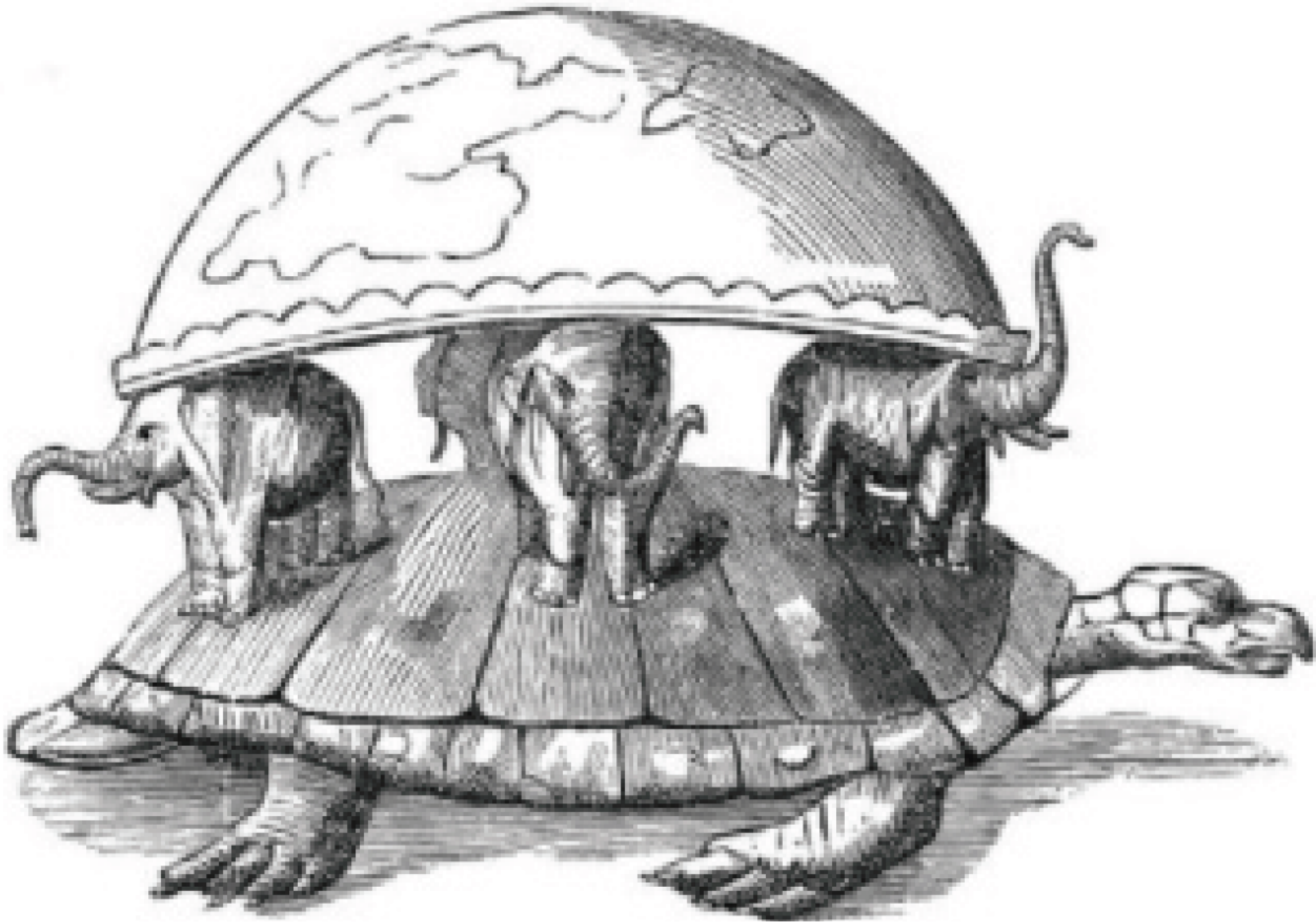


Photo courtesy of Ruth Rodriguez

International Students Feature: Turkey

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This week, Aslinur Taskin, a third year student from Turkey studying architecture, gave her two cents about the differences between her home country and life in America. Taskin is from Ankara, the country's capital. While she recognized that each city is different, she thought that as a whole Turkey's history was much more visible than America's because there were many "traditional things still from the Ottoman Empire," like old mosques. Another clear difference, according to Taskin, was the organization of the streets themselves. "There are no perpendicular streets; everything is diagonal. You can get lost even if you've lived there your whole life." Because of this, Taskin explained, Google Maps is a necessity when traveling.

Taskin left Turkey after the third grade. However, she briefly remarked upon the differences in academics. When she moved here, she remembers that "all of the math and sciences here were very behind. By the time I was in fifth grade, we went over the math stuff that I had gone over in second grade." Additionally, Taskin has friends in Turkey that tell her the architecture program at Turkish universities is only four years, a year shorter than the five year program at Illinois Tech. It's the same environment, though, Taskin said. Architecture colleges consist of both studio space and lecture space, although she said that "here maybe it's more artsy, but it also depends on the school." She explained that there is less of an emphasis placed upon math and science

classes for architecture majors in the U.S. than in Turkey. In Turkey, there are no separate architecture and architectural engineering programs, yet here the classes that make the two different are those math and science

classes. Because of these extra classes and the shorter period to complete them, architecture students in Turkey experience a heavier class load.

Readers may be surprised to hear that American food, in Taskin's words, "is not anything compared to food over there." Taskin thought that this difference came from the varying ingredients that each country uses. "Let's say my mom is making a particular

dish," Taskin explained, "when she makes it in Turkey, it tastes completely different than if she would make it here. It doesn't taste as good [here]." People living in Turkey get their fresh ingredients from the bazaar, or marketplace,

every Sunday. Taskin's grandmother, she said, went there often, and as a result, those that worked there always recognized her and offered her discounts. According to Taskin, people at the bazaar are very friendly and most everyone knows each other because every neighborhood has its own bazaar. She contrasted this to American life, remarking that "even if you go to the same mall, that guy is not going to remember you at all." Taskin also

explained that bargaining with shop owners was common, even expected, in Turkey, yet not at all common here.

As an example of common ingredients that differ between countries, Taskin said that the use of solid oils like butter were hardly, if ever, used in Turkey. Instead of butter, cream is very common, and Taskin recalled times when she would eat it on toast for breakfast. According to Taskin, breakfasts also commonly consist of olives, cheeses, barbecued peppers, eggs, bread, and paninis. Turkish coffee is usually served after breakfast, not during, and it is usually the responsibility of the youngest person in the family to make coffee for everyone else. Dinner, on the other hand, usually consists of soup first, followed by a salad, then a cold bean dish, and then rice served with meat and yogurt, which is much different than the yogurt that is commonly sold in American grocery stores, and is more salty than sweet. After the rice dish, fruit is served (commonly watermelon and grapes) as well as nuts, such as walnuts and almonds. The almonds are commonly soaked in water before they are eaten, Taskin explained, so that the skin goes away. Tea and dessert conclude the meal, after what Taskin described to be about a five hour process. It is no surprise, then, to find that she thinks dinner is a very rushed process in America. "Here you eat your dinner and you're done. [In Turkey you] calmly end your system right. You don't eat dinner and then you're like 'oh no, I have so much food.'" Overall, Taskin thought that a typical diet from back home was healthier than an American one, a feeling that many international students shared with TechNews this semester.



Photo by Anoopa Sundararajan