

My Turtle Story

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Austria is not a country that is not particularly rich in turtle diversity. Except for some non-native, released or escaped sliders and cooters we only have the European pond turtle that occurs in a very restricted range east of Vienna. For some reason, we still have a strong turtle community including a natural history museum in Vienna with a world-known turtle collection, several turtle conservation centers and at one point we have even had two clubs for turtle enthusiasts! How all that came? I cannot tell for sure, but in my case I definitely know that turtles have fascinated me since I was a little kid.

I got my first aquarium (a 54l fish tank) when I was 8 years old and from then on, I always had aquatic critters around me. Later, when I was around 10 years old, I got my first turtles – two red eared slider hatchlings. They outgrew their tank, killed their tankmates and thus had to move into a bigger tank. No surprise, the larger tank wasn't large enough for them to be kept in long-term. But the fire was there and even though I had to hand them over to a turtle keeper with more resources I knew I would restart with a smaller species. That species would be the black knobbed map turtle and soon, two southern painted turtles followed in a separate tank – all while still living in a fairly small apartment with my two sisters and our single mom.



Since I was interested in biology from my early days on, I also chose schools that had a focus on natural sciences and I started to study at the University of Vienna, specializing in herpetology and limnology. During these days, my love for South American side-necked turtles grew and turned into something close to obsession that still burns on today, as I keep multiple species of side-necks. Due to my back-then part time job (studies must be financed!) as sales assistant/animal caretaker in a pet store I had access to supplies for turtle keeping and since I moved into my father's house, more space was available – so I stocked my first turtle room. During these times, internet forums were widely used by enthusiasts all around the world and so I met people from the USA online that I would soon meet in person when I visited the famous Daytona reptile show. Since then, I support TTPG (www.ttpg.org) by giving talks at their annual conference and helping the editorial team of THE BATAGUR with article acquisition.



Nowadays I live in a house with my wife, two kids, turtles, geckos, a bearded dragon, fishes and invertebrates that we collectively care for. As a volunteer, I am the editor in chief of SACALIA magazine, which is the International Turtle Association's (www.isv.cc) members' magazine. In addition I do zoological consulting, (scientific) publishing and a bit of sci-com via my Facebook and Instagram pages under the name ZooCon (www.zoocon.org). Did I mention that I work 40 hours per week as a project manager for technical documentation of a particle accelerator?

All this might seem a lot, but if you care enough for your family and have a life-long passion like turtles, it's not work – it's fun! In order to be able to continue having fun, learning is just as important as physical labor is. I always strive to receive new insights that can help me to improve my husbandry and so my studies have led me to places like Florida's springs, the Amazonian rainforest, the Gran Chaco or Thailand's tropical dry broadleaf forest, where I first-hand-experienced how turtles survive in their environment to better understand their needs in human care. Therefore I like to support projects like ITTW, so young humans can learn what it

means to become fascinated with something and that fascination can lead to making a difference in the world – even if it is on smaller scale like keeping your chelonians at home healthy and happy.