

# Sidedoor (S11E23) – Shellshocked Part Two

## final web transcript

**Lizzie Peabody:** This is Sidedoor, a podcast from the Smithsonian with support from PRX. I'm Lizzie Peabody.

**Lizzie:** One fine morning, Wan Yee Ng strides out of an Airbnb on the shores of Lake Wallace. It's summertime in Vermont, and by the looks of it, a nice day for a paddle. But as she pulls an inflatable kayak to the shores of the lake, what she doesn't know is that she is being watched.

**Lizzie:** This isn't the first time Ng has rented this very Airbnb. And her husband has rented how own place on the opposite side of Lake Wallace—in Canada. He's preparing to launch his own boat. Ng heaves a duffel bag aboard the boat and starts to push it toward the water. And just as she's about to shove off, Border Patrol agents surround her, flash their badges. And when they peer into her half-zipped-up duffel bag, they see socks. But these aren't innocent gym socks. These socks are moving.

*[NEWS CLIP: When agents searched the bag, they found 29 of these live eastern box turtles wrapped in socks. In June, Wan Lee Ng was arrested for the alleged attempted smuggling of 29 eastern box turtles from the US to Canada.]*

*[NEWS CLIP: Ng pleaded guilty in federal court to one count of unlawfully attempting to export and send those turtles out of the US.]*

*[NEWS CLIP: According to messages on Ng's cell phone, investigators say she planned to smuggle the turtles into Canada and then sell them in Hong Kong.]*

*[NEWS CLIP: Turtles with colorful markings are prized on the illegal global pet trade market.]*

**Lizzie:** Turtles like the ones Ng collected make valuable exotic pets

**Tom Akre:** A lot of these turtles are sought after for their looks—the shape, the color and the patterns. You know, they're versions of jewels to some degree. They are unbelievably beautiful.

**Lizzie:** Tom Akre is a conservation ecologist at the Smithsonian's National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute. He says box turtles are just one of many kinds of turtles snatched from their homes and sold as pets overseas.

**Tom Akre:** So that includes the wood turtle, the box turtle, the bog turtle, the spotted turtle. And those turtles have been flowing out of the United States into Europe and Asia in big numbers here and there over the last two decades.

**[NEWS CLIP:** Florida man faces 50 years in prison over a turtle-smuggling scheme.]

**[NEWS CLIP:** The United States Department of Justice arrested Kreatsoulas, accusing him of illegally exporting thousands of turtles to Germany and Hong Kong.]

**[NEWS CLIP:** Pennsylvania man is accused of trying to get past airport security with a turtle in his pants.]

**[NEWS CLIP:** Officers confiscated the turtle, which did not appear to be harmed. It's unclear if the man kept the turtle as a pet, and why it was in his pants.]

**Lizzie:** But where the news stories end is where a whole other story begins. Once law enforcement officers seize the turtles, the question becomes ...

**Tom Akre:** Where do they go?

**Lizzie:** This time on Sidedoor, we find out how turtle trafficking took off, what becomes of these confiscated turtles and what it takes to get them back home. Last episode, we learned about the eastern box turtle and the many threats they face today, but in part two of our turtle series, we'll delve into the world of turtle poaching, and meet a few contraband tetrapods who only narrowly escaped the black market. It's turtle crime fightin' time after the break.

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**Intern:** We have the Elk Room, the Deer Room, Falcon, Catfish.

**Lizzie:** If you were to have a question about fishing or hunting in the state of Virginia, you'd hit up the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources. And that's where I am, in Richmond, Virginia at their headquarters, where every conference room is named for an animal.

**Lizzie:** And where are we right now?

**JD Kleopfer:** In the Turkey Room. [laughs]

**Lizzie:** *I like it in the turkey room. It's got some real ...*

**JD Kleopfer:** *It's quaint. It's cozy.*

**Lizzie:** Surrounded by paintings of turkeys, I'm sitting down with JD Kleopfer, the Virginia state herpetologist. And I'll say it so you don't have to.

**Lizzie:** *I'll be honest, I did not realize that the state had a designated herpetologist.*

**JD Kleopfer:** *Okay. Probably most people don't. [laughs]*

**Lizzie:** Herpetology is the study of reptiles and amphibians.

**JD Kleopfer:** *Which is kind of strange because reptiles and amphibians are really not that closely related taxonomically. Somehow they just got lumped together. The cold-blooded, for lack of a better term, just kinda got lumped together, and they're like things that people were less interested in studying, they just kinda put them all over there. So we'll just call that "herpetology."*

**Lizzie:** *The Island of Misfit Toys!*

**JD Kleopfer:** *That's right! There you go. Fair enough.*

**Lizzie:** *The Discipline of Misfit Cold-Blooded Animals.*

**JD Kleopfer:** Yes.

**Lizzie:** JD is both a scientific expert and a front-line defender of wild reptiles and amphibians in the state of Virginia. That means he does everything from responding to calls about a weird snake on someone's porch to collaborating with organizations like the Smithsonian on conservation research, educating the public and combating the illegal trade of wildlife. Like turtles.

**Lizzie:** *How big a problem is turtle trafficking?*

**JD Kleopfer:** *It's huge. It's a major problem. Turtles are the most illegally traded major*

*taxonomic group there is out there.*

**Lizzie:** *Wow!*

**JD Kleopfer:** *For vertebrates. Yeah, turtles, and then there's everybody else.*

**Lizzie:** But it wasn't always this way. Turtle trafficking is a relatively new problem. See, before the 1990s, not a lot of mainstream attention went to reptiles and amphibians. There wasn't a lot of research money going to the Island of Misfit Cold-Blooded Animals. That's part of the reason we don't have as much historical data on turtle populations as we do on, say, birds and mammals.

**Lizzie:** And like many things, this was largely a PR problem. Snakes are saddled with the unfortunate biblical association with sin. And "cold-blooded" literally means unfeeling or heartless in the English language. People weren't exactly falling all over themselves to invest in studying—or saving—a bunch of sneaky, scaly, creepy, cold-blooded creatures. But JD says in the 1990s something changed.

**JD Kleopfer:** *There was a pop culture phenomenon that occurred.*

**[ARCHIVE CLIP, Crocodile Hunter: This is almost as big as modern day crocs get.]**

**JD Kleopfer:** *A combination of The Crocodile Hunter and Jurassic Park.*

**[ARCHIVE CLIP, Jurassic Park: There it is.]**

**JD Kleopfer:** *Those two came out, and that just blew up the field of herpetology and started to draw a lot of attention to reptile and amphibian conservation.*

**Lizzie:** This was great news for herpetologists. But in addition to bringing in research dollars, it also made reptiles all that and a bag of chips—meaning "cool."

**JD Kleopfer:** *And so the collecting started to take off.*

**Lizzie:** All of a sudden, lots of people wanted turtles as pets. And why not? They sound like great pets! They're little, they're easy to keep in an apartment. They don't make noise, they don't make messes. They're really cool-looking and cute. But JD says don't be fooled.

**JD Kleopfer:** *They do not make great pets, usually.*

**Lizzie:** *Why not?*

**JD Kleopfer:** *Because they tend to outlive their owners. [laughs]*

**Lizzie:** Turtles are what JD calls "will pets." You better be prepared to write them into your will.

**JD Kleopfer:** *Many turtles can live to a hundred years plus. Any pet is a lifetime commitment; it's not just for the duration of your interest. I think there's a saying that goes, "Pets are for keeps, look before you leaps."*

**Lizzie:** And he says the idea that a turtle is easy to care for is totally wrong.

**JD Kleopfer:** *They're not easy to take care of. They do require very specific lighting and diet and stuff like that.*

**Lizzie:** And just because a turtle stays alive doesn't mean it's healthy—or happy. It just doesn't have a lot of ways to express that to you.

**JD Kleopfer:** *And I've seen some pretty horrific photos of turtles that have just been really poorly taken care of, and they're in pretty bad shape. But man, they're—they're tough animals.*

**Lizzie:** *They're trucking.*

**JD Kleopfer:** *They keep on ticking. They're the Timex of the animal world.*

**Lizzie:** *[laughs] The Timex of the animal world!*

**JD Kleopfer:** *They take a licking and keep on ticking.*

**Lizzie:** It's this hardiness—their ability to stay alive—that has arguably been their greatest strength for hundreds of millions of years. But in the modern era, their greatest strength started to become their greatest weakness. As demand for pet turtles took off, so did ...

**JD Kleopfer:** *Illegal turtle trade. And the illegal turtle trade was just thriving because turtles were easy. They're easy to ship.*

**Lizzie:** *They're easy to ship because you can just, like, bundle them up in a sock.*

**JD Kleopfer:** *Bundle them up in a sock, put them in a can and stick them in a box and ship them away. And most likely they'll probably survive.*

**Lizzie:** The Timex of the animal kingdom. Turtles were a pretty good investment for traffickers. They could stoically and silently weather horrific travel conditions—and they could fetch a high price.

**JD Kleopfer:** *So the trade has just kind of got bigger and bigger, and then with the internet coming along, that just kind of threw fuel on the fire.*

**Lizzie:** Videos like this one, showing a turtle following a cat around on a tiny skateboard, rack up hundreds of thousands, sometimes millions of views on social media.

**[ARCHIVE CLIP, YouTube: Wherever my cat goes in the house, her turtle BFF has to be right next to her.]**

**Lizzie:** The internet sped everything up: the demand, the buying, the selling.

**JD Kleopfer:** *It became the Wild West. Anybody could get involved with it and try to make money at it.*

**Lizzie:** Joe Shmoe could find a box turtle in his backyard in Tennessee and sell it online for big bucks. Especially in China, which was quickly becoming the epicenter of turtle imports.

**Tom Akre:** *You know, they were calling it the Asian turtle crisis because turtles were disappearing from the wild in Asia, even though the landscape was still intact.*

**Lizzie:** Tom Akre again. As Asian turtle populations collapsed, importers began sourcing more turtles from the Americas and Africa and the rest of the world.

**Tom Akre:** *And is now very much a global crisis.*

**Lizzie:** But what's global is also local.

**Tim Dooley:** *We've always got one or more of those cases going. We probably got 10 or more going right now that were—that are active. So ...*

**Lizzie:** *Wow! Ten active investigations?*

**Tim Dooley:** Yes.

**Lizzie:** This is First Sergeant Tim Dooley. He's assistant special agent in charge of special operations with the Virginia Conservation Police—basically a wilderness cop.

**Lizzie:** *How much of your job involves illegal turtles versus other illegal trade?*

**Tim Dooley:** *I would say right now it's probably 70-30, roughly.*

**Lizzie:** *Seventy percent turtles?*

**Tim Dooley:** *I would say probably so.*

**Lizzie:** First Sergeant Dooley has seen a lot in his decades on the force: people getting lost in the woods, people getting lost on the water, people hunting for things they shouldn't hunt for, and generally getting up to shenanigans in the wild.

**Lizzie:** *Have you personally ever caught a turtle trafficker?*

**Tim Dooley:** *I have.*

**Lizzie:** *And is there a certain kind of profile to the kind of person who trafficks turtles?*

**Tim Dooley:** *Not necessarily, because you know, the word—I guess the word "traffick" is kind of—can be kind of broad.*

**Lizzie:** *Hmm*

**Lizzie:** Like say someone has a pet turtle but it's outgrown its tank—and they're kinda bored

with it.

**Tim Dooley:** *And now they're looking to do something with it. And so they'll—they'll try to sell it.*

**Lizzie:** But it's illegal to sell native or naturalized turtles in the state of Virginia.

**Tim Dooley:** *So technically they're trafficking turtles.*

**Lizzie:** But in reality, many people simply don't know any better. Similarly, a lot of pet stores sell illegally sourced turtles, and people buy them without realizing it.

**Tim Dooley:** *I'll tell on myself. When I was—when I was younger, before I, you know, got into this line of work, I had a pet turtle. And I was—I fell into the category of I just didn't know.*

**Lizzie:** He was nine years old and a fan of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.

**Tim Dooley:** *And I bought it at a pet store. You know, assumed the pet store was selling it, it had to be good.*

**Lizzie:** In retrospect, Tim knows there's a good chance the store was selling it illegally because today he sees how common that is

**Tim Dooley:** *You know, pet stores that are selling things they shouldn't have, shouldn't be selling is a big issue that we—that we face a lot.*

**Lizzie:** When he was nine though, he didn't think twice about it. And like many turtle pet owners ...

**Tim Dooley:** *Got this thing and pretty quickly realized I was a little bit in over my head. Now I'm somebody that doesn't give up easily, and so I—you know, I figured things out and did some research after the fact. I kept the turtle for a lot of years until it eventually, you know, passed away on its own.*

**Lizzie:** *Hmm. What was your turtle's name?*

**Tim Dooley:** *[laughs] Tubby.*



**Lizzie:** *[laughs]*

**Tim Dooley:** *I never thought I'd tell anybody that one.*

**Lizzie:** *That's a good name for a turtle.*

**Tim Dooley:** *That's the best I could come up with, that's the best nine-year-old me could come up with.*

**Lizzie:** If Tim had gotten overwhelmed by the responsibilities of turtle husbandry and freed Tubby into his backyard or sold him to a neighbor, he would have made himself into an accidental criminal. And some cases Tim sees are like that. But ...

**Tim Dooley:** *We also—we deal with folks that are in what we call "in the trade." And so these are people that are looking to make a living, make money off of constant selling of these wildlife.*

**Lizzie:** For example: a year or so ago, one of Dooley's agents got word that there was a guy in the area looking to buy spotted turtles, which are illegal to sell in Virginia.

**Tim Dooley:** *And so essentially one of my agents made contact, set up this deal.*

**Lizzie:** *It's like a sting operation!*

**Tim Dooley:** *Sort of. Sort of.*

**Lizzie:** *[laughs]*

**Tim Dooley:** *So one thing—one thing we don't like to do is we don't like to take turtles out of the wild and put them into the trade. So what we'll do though is we'll use turtles that we've either seized or been relinquished to us for whatever reason.*

**Lizzie:** The agent looked through the turtles already in the state's possession, confiscated from someone else.

**Tim Dooley:** *And so it just so happened that we had the species on hand that this gentleman*

*was looking for, which was a spotted turtle.*

**Lizzie:** This decoy turtle was about to deep undercover—I mean, undershell. The guy offered \$200 for the turtle.

**Tim Dooley:** *You know, the agent met, completed this sale.*

**Lizzie:** And then the agent bided his time.

**Tim Dooley:** *You know, checked in a few months later, you know, "How's the turtle doing?" This gentleman sends a photograph that's got other turtles in the picture as well so now we know we're onto something.*

**Lizzie:** Before too long, the buyer was back. He wanted more turtles. The agent sold him another, and with some additional sleuthing found out where the suspected trafficker was reselling his turtles. A different agent bought a few of those, and once they'd built a solid case ...

**Tim Dooley:** *We ended up executing a search warrant on his residence where these things were being kept at.*

**Lizzie:** They found 18 turtles.

**Tim Dooley:** *Two river cooters, a Cumberland slider, two yellow sliders, two Mississippi map turtles, two painted turtles and nine red-eared sliders.*

**Lizzie:** Busted!

**Tim Dooley:** *He was definitely what we call "in the trade."*

**Lizzie:** But now the question was ...

**Tim Dooley:** *What to do with these turtles once they're confiscated? You know, hundreds of these turtles, potentially.*

**Lizzie:** These turtles were evidence in the state's case, but unlike seized drugs or weapons, you can't just stash turtles in a storage locker for months or even years until the trial. These

are living, breathing things.

**Tim Dooley:** *Okay, now you've got these animals in your possession. Now what do you do with them?*

**Lizzie:** A turtle can't tell you where it's been. And you can't just release turtles of unknown origin into any old forest. As we know from our last episode, turtles are creatures of habit. If you take a 40-year-old turtle who has spent his whole life moving from his burrow to his favorite rock to his favorite bush and back, and you put him in a completely new forest, possibly in a different state, he's not gonna do well. So what becomes of a turtle with no country? We'll find out after the break.

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**Lizzie:** *Okay, just pulled up. Virginia Wildlife Center. It's beautiful, shady.*

**Lizzie:** The Wildlife Center of Virginia is tucked against a hillside at the edge of the Virginia National Forest.

*[car door slams]*

**Lizzie:** Birds chirp, sunlight filters through the dense tree cover. It looks more like a woodsy retreat center than a hospital. But that's what it is. Out front, cars circle through the drive, bringing sick and injured wild animals through the doors, like an emergency room for critters.

**Connor Gillespie:** *At this point, we're admitting around 4,800 animals every year. We're getting pretty close to 5,000.*

**Lizzie:** Connor Gillespie is outreach director for the center, and he's giving me the lay of the land.

**Connor Gillespie:** *We're a wildlife hospital, so anytime there's a wild animal that is injured or sick or orphaned, we're here to provide treatment for those animals with the goal of getting them back out in the wild and releasing them.*

**Lizzie:** Patients range from teeny-weeny hummingbirds to snakes to black bears and everything in between.

**Connor Gillespie:** *Any native species you can think of.*

**Lizzie:** The morning I visited, I got there just in time for the morning turtle rounds.

**Dr. Karra:** *Those are already ready here.*

**Lizzie:** *So is that box turtle getting an injection?*

**Dr. Karra:** *Correct. Yes.*

**Lizzie:** *Oh!*

**Dr. Karra:** *Yeah, so that one's getting pain medication, antibiotics and anti-inflammatories due to the ear infection.*

**Lizzie:** This is Dr. Karra. She's the director of veterinary services, and oversees the whole vet program here. She sits at a table in the middle of the clinic, sunlight streaming through the skylights overhead. And around her, at least eight other people in scrubs are tending turtles of all kinds.

**Dr. Karra:** *I have to multitask slightly.*

**Lizzie:** *No that's quite alright, that's quite alright.*

**Dr. Karra:** *I have to shepherd the humans.*

**Lizzie:** *Totally.*

**Lizzie:** The humans she's shepherding are interns, students and vet techs, all helping with the turtle rounds. And there are a lot of turtles to tend: box turtles, wood turtles, painted turtles, river cooters, snapping turtles, hit by cars, hit by lawn mowers, chewed on by dogs.

**Connor Gillespie:** *This looks like a minor fracture, is that correct?*

**Veterinary tech:** *Yes.*

**Lizzie:** Two people in scrubs are fixing up a turtle with a broken shell, probably hit by a car. One of them sorts through a box of metal bars.

**Lizzie:** *So you're sort of finding the right metal brace, the right size?*

**Veterinary tech:** *Mm-hmm.*

**Lizzie:** *To mold it to the shell?*

**Lizzie:** While another mixes up a kind of putty.

**Veterinary tech:** *So you kind of like mix it together, and then it hardens up. And it's really strong.*

**Lizzie:** It's kind of a Humpty Dumpty situation.

**Connor Gillespie:** *Adhere the bar to that turtle's shell.*

**Lizzie:** *Uh-huh?*

**Connor Gillespie:** *And it can help fuse those kind of fractured pieces back together over time.*

**Lizzie:** *So it's like a cast.*

**Connor Gillespie:** *Yeah. Yeah, sort of like that.*

**Lizzie:** But turtles can make challenging patients. Not far away ...

**Veterinary tech:** *We were trying to unbox this turtle to get blood.*

**Lizzie:** *[laughs]*

**Veterinary tech:** *And she is very tightly boxed right now.*

**Lizzie:** *She does not want to be disturbed.*

**Lizzie:** Students bustle around, turtles in hand.

**Dr. Karra:** *Joe I was gonna have you and Annika do a snapper next, if you're cool with that.*

**Veterinary tech:** *Sounds good.*

**Lizzie:** And at the center of it all is Dr. Karra. She's like a train conductor.

**Lizzie:** *This is like Grand Central Station in here!*

**Dr. Karra:** *Yes it is. Turtle time is busy. It's a busy time.*

**Lizzie:** As we learned trekking through the forest with Max and Chris last episode, springtime is an especially busy turtle time.

**Connor Gillespie:** *At this point, it's pretty rare to go more than, say, two days without getting a turtle right now.*

**Lizzie:** That's because turtles are on the move, looking for food, frolicking and fornicating—the three Fs of turtles. Dr. Karra holds up another patient, likely picked up from the side of the road by a concerned member of the public.

**Dr. Karra:** *And we know this turtle's female because we took radiographs and she has eggs inside of her.*

**Lizzie:** *Oh, wow! Okay.*

**Dr. Karra:** *And it's actually really common. That's the most common time they get hit by cars, because they leave their pond and travel to somewhere to lay the eggs, often crossing a road unfortunately. And then they get hit. That's bone. This is exposed open bone, basically.*

**Lizzie:** We watch as dozens of turtles are brought out for treatment, then tucked back in their rehab pens. But in another part of the hospital there's a group of turtles with their own separate room.

**Connor Gillespie:** *This room we're in right now was not originally meant to be a turtle room. It was designed for other things.*

**Lizzie:** But today, most of the room is taken up with large plastic bins full of running water and rocks. There are about 12 turtles in here, and on each bin is a label describing its occupant. Connor reads aloud from a bin holding two painted turtles.

**Connor Gillespie:** *"Admission date, August 31, 2023." So we're coming up on the two-year mark for him.*

**Lizzie:** *Wow! And it looks like "Cause of injury: inappropriate ..."*

**Connor Gillespie:** *Possession.*

**Lizzie:** *"... possession."*

**Connor Gillespie:** *"Confiscation." DWR brought it to us.*

**Lizzie:** The Department of Wildlife Resources. After agents like First Sergeant Tim Dooley intercept a turtle trafficker, they need to send the turtles somewhere they know they'll be cared for.

**Connor Gillespie:** *So the Department of Wildlife Resources actually came to us and asked if we could partner to kind of help solve this problem. While they're taking those poachers to court and, you know, working out these court cases, we will take care of those turtles while that's going on here at our center.*

**Lizzie:** The Virginia Wildlife Center cares for these trafficking victims until the case is resolved. But once the case is over, they need somewhere to go. And if we don't know where the turtles were taken from ...

**Connor Gillespie:** *They can't be released. They do not survive well if they're relocated out of their home range. And also, you know, if we just picked any spot to release them, there's a chance that that turtle could have some type of disease that we're introducing to this new population here, and so it could be a risk for wild turtles. So it's complicated.*

**Lizzie:** Tom Akre of the Smithsonian Turtle Conservation Ecology Lab says ...

**Tom Akre:** *If you've got a reasonably healthy group of confiscates, are you gonna put them back on top of your healthy population? A lot of people would say no because that's too disruptive to your healthy population.*

**Lizzie:** But emerging research might make it possible for science to help get these turtles back into the wild.

**Tom Akre:** *So one way we're trying to support that is through working with partners like the Turtle Survival Alliance and others to try to understand the turtle tree of life.*

**Lizzie:** Tom Akre says the Smithsonian's Turtle Conservation Ecology Lab is working with the Turtle Survival Alliance to explore the connection between a turtle's genome and its native habitat to see if science can answer the question a turtle can't answer for itself.

**Tom Akre:** *Where did that animal actually come from? Can you look at its DNA and figure out where it came from? And they are, and we are getting better and better and better at that. And they have a big initiative to try to figure all that out for North American turtles, and we'd like to support them in doing that.*

**Lizzie:** But we're not there yet. For now, most confiscated turtles remain in limbo.

**Connor Gillespie:** *We're a holding facility for them, really. We're not gonna be their—their permanent home. And we can't be because we're gonna have so many other animals coming in need of help that we can't take care of them forever.*

**Lizzie:** The Wildlife Center of Virginia will try to place these turtles with zoos, aquariums or other places to care for them long term, but the problem is many of these places are already at capacity. Take the two painted turtles I'm watching swim around their black plastic tank between their fake plants under artificial lighting. They may never again swim in a river, feel the sunlight on their shells or the crunch of real leaves under their little feet.

**Connor Gillespie:** *So we're doing our hardest. You know, we're looking into every good possibility.*

**Lizzie:** It would be so much better if we could just plunk these little guys in a forest to pursue the three Fs of Turtleland and be free. Or better yet, if they'd never been plucked from the forest to begin with. Since getting trafficked turtles back home is such a challenge, First Sergeant Tim Dooley says focusing on preventative measures goes a long way.

**Tim Dooley:** *We're hoping to enhance some of these code sections so that not only is it*



*illegal, but there's, you know, stiffer penalties and that type of thing that go along with it.*

**Lizzie:** But we have a role, too.

**Tim Dooley:** *You know, the public is actually really, really helpful. Having folks out there that care and are willing to speak up when something's not right is always beneficial.*

**Lizzie:** Take it from the Virginia State herpetologist himself.

**JD Kleopfer:** *See something, say something.*

**Tim Dooley:** *We will never turn information away, and we do look at everything that comes in.*

**Lizzie:** Humans have never lived in a world without turtles—and we don't know what would happen without them. But studying them in the wild is helping us better understand and protect them from the threats we can control, because a more turtle-friendly world is ultimately a friendlier world for all of us.

**Tom Akre:** *I care about turtles a lot more than the average person, but I care about turtles because for me, they are a window into the deep history of our planet. Turtles tell a story of this—this tremendous lineage, and they have a tremendous amount of accumulated wisdom of their landscape over time.*

**Lizzie:** And so can we all just agree to let the turtles be? At their own pace.

**Connor Gillespie:** *Leave the turtles be! [laughs]*

**Lizzie:** *Leave the turtles be!*

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**Lizzie:** You've been listening to Sidedoor, a podcast from the Smithsonian with support from PRX. If you're wondering what you can do if you suspect turtle poaching in your state, you can visit the CCITT website. That's the Collaborative to Combat the Illegal Trade in Turtles. We'll put a link to it in our newsletter. You can subscribe at [SI.edu/sidedoor](http://SI.edu/sidedoor).

**Lizzie:** And for behind the scenes pictures of all our turtle adventures, check us out on social

media @SidedoorPod.

**Lizzie:** For help with this episode, we want to thank JD Kleopfer, First Sergeant Tim Dooley, Connor Gillespie, Dr. Karra, Alex Alvera, and all the patient vets and students who let me peer over their shoulders and pester them with questions.

**Lizzie:** Our podcast is produced by James Morrison and me, Lizzie Peabody. Our fact-checker is Nathalie Boyd. Executive producer is Ann Conanan. Our editorial team is Jess Sadeq and Sharon Bryant. Episode artwork is by Dave Leonard. Transcripts are done by Russell Gragg. Extra support comes from PRX. Our show is mixed by Tarek Fouda. Our theme song and episode music are by Breakmaster Cylinder.

**Lizzie:** If you want to sponsor our show, please email sponsorship [at] prx [dot] org.

**Lizzie:** This is the final episode of our season! But don't worry, we'll keep you entertained with a summer playlist of some of our other favorite shows while we work on making new stories for the new season this coming fall. In the meantime, if you have questions, thoughts, requests, pitches, get in touch! Send us an email at Sidedoor [at] si [dot] edu.

**Lizzie:** I'm your host, Lizzie Peabody. Thanks for listening.

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**Lizzie:** *I have heard you affectionately call reptiles "herps."*

**Tim Dooley:** *Mm-hmm.*

**Lizzie:** *So does that make poachers, "herps perps?"*

**Tim Dooley:** *Herps perps? [laughs] I don't know. If you coin that phrase, I'll give you total credit on that.*

**Lizzie:** *You don't want credit for it?*

**Tim Dooley:** *I don't want credit for that, no. I'm not gonna have that tagline put on my tombstone. You can have that one. [laughs]*

