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# Pune: 120 Indian Star Tortoises Rescued From Illegal Wildlife Trade Repatriated To Their Natural Habitats In Maharashtra



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Pune, 30th October 2021: RESQ Charitable Trust (RCT) returned 120 Indian Star Tortoises in the wild which were seized from the illegal wildlife trade. This release is significant in marking a public-private collaboration of a 'Reptile Transit Unit' (RTU) to re-wild animals seized from illegal trafficking and demonstrates a commitment to returning poached wildlife to the wild.

In July 2021, the Reptile Transit Unit operated by RCT and Maharashtra Forest Department distributed a Captive Turtle Data Collection Form to all Range Forest Officers in the state. A total of 217 turtles seized from the illegal trade were reported, including several Schedule I and IV protected species like Black Spotted Pond Turtles, Indian Roof Turtles, Tricarinate Hill Turtle, Indian Tent Turtles, Elongated Tortoise and Indian Star Tortoises. RCT organised the logistics to collect and transport all these turtles to the RTU located at the RESQCT Wildlife TTC in Pune.



In the RTU at the RESQ Wildlife TTC, the turtles were provided quarantine and medical care for 4 weeks where they were observed for symptoms of disease and pre-release wellness examinations by Wildlife Veterinarians at RCT, Dr. Sushruth Shirbhate and Dr. Nikita Mehta.

This was followed by 4 weeks of intensive rehabilitation, planned and executed by reptile rehabilitators, Nishanth Ravi and Sonesh Ingole, to transition them from their previous captive diets to one that they would get in the wild. At the end of this process, 120 Indian Star Tortoises were ready to return to the wild.



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On Friday, 29th October, 2021, 120 Indian Star Tortoises were transferred from the RESQ Wildlife TTC (Pune) to Chandrapur side and were successfully released.

Tuhin Satarkar and Naresh Chandak from the RESQ Team reported that most tortoises confidently scrambled away on being released and he noticed several immediately began eating the grass in the area that they were released.

Rescued Indian Star Tortoise begins e...



India has one of the most diverse distribution of turtles and tortoises in the world. With an increasing population and market that seeks rare and easy species as pet, these tortoises are a common target. Despite strict laws that protect these species, rampant trade continues. Returning captive turtles and tortoises was conceptualised by Vivek Khandekar in 2020 when he was CCF(T) Pune. Thereafter, this initiative has been taken forward by RESQ Charitable Trust, Pune which set-up a dedicated Reptile Transit Unit at their Wildlife Transit Treatment Centre (TTC) in Bavdhan after approval and support from Sunil Limaye PCCF (Wildlife), Maharashtra Forest Department.

This is the third chelonion transfer and release by RESQ this year after 2 prior pilot releases (1 inter and 1 intra-state) which was conducted to set-up smooth



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do not have distribution in our state will be returned to locations in India with the help of other partners like Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA) and collaboration with other states Forest Departments.

This endeavour to return these chelonians back where they belong would not have been possible without the immense support and cooperation of Maharashtra Forest Department, PCCF (Wildlife), CCFs and Deputy Conservator of Forests of Pune, Solapur, Thane, Alibag, Satara, Central Chanda, Field Director - Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve, State Wildlife Advisory Board Member - Anuj Khare and non-governmental organisations RAWW (Thane), WWA (Thane) and Indian Herpetological Society (Pune).

**(Neha Panchamia is president of Pune-based RESQ Charitable Trust which aims to minimise animal suffering and reduce human-animal conflict by providing emergency animal rescue, rehabilitation, medical aid and conducting education and awareness programs to promote peaceful coexistence between humans and animals.)**

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