

Center opens to protect rare turtle in Cambodia

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An eighteen kilograms Cantor's soft-shell turtle lays on the floor before release at an opening of the Mekong Turtle Conservation Center in Kratie province, 160 kilometers (100 miles) northeast Phnom Penh, Cambodia, Wednesday, June 8, 2011. Conservationists have opened a shelter in Cambodia for a rare type of endangered soft-shell turtle. (AP Photo/Heng Sinith)

(AP) -- An extremely rare soft-shell turtle species has a new, protected home in Cambodia.

The critically endangered Cantor's giant soft-shell turtle is one of the rarest freshwater [turtles](#) in the world. Scientists last saw one in the Cambodian wild in 2003, and small numbers have been seen in neighboring Laos.

U.S.-based Conservation International says it opened the Mekong Turtle Conservation Center on Wednesday in Kratie province, 160 kilometers

(100 miles) northeast of Phnom Penh.

An 18-kilogram (40-pound) female turtle was released into the conservation pond at a Buddhist pagoda at the center's launch.

The species can grow up to 2 meters (6 feet) in length and weigh more than 50 kilograms (110 pounds).

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