

Rare, once-royal turtle to be tracked in Cambodia

January 21 2012



In this photo taken Monday, Jan. 16, 2012, provided by The Wildlife Conservation Society, a 75-pound (34-kilogram) southern river terrapin, one of only some 200 adults remaining in the wild, waddles on sand as it is released near the Sre Ambel river in Cambodia. With a satellite transmitter embedded in its shell, one of the world's most endangered turtles was released to track how it will navigate through commercial fishing grounds and other man-made hazards. (AP Photo/ The Wildlife Conservation Society, Eleanor Briggs)

(AP) -- One of the world's most endangered turtles has been released into a Cambodian river with a satellite transmitter attached to its shell to track how it will navigate through commercial fishing grounds and other man-made hazards.

The 75-pound (34-kilogram) southern river terrapin - one of only about 200 adults remaining in the wild - waddled into the Sre Ambel river in

southwestern Cambodia this past week to the cheers of local residents and conservationists.

The New York-based Wildlife Conservation Society said the female terrapin was given to the group last year instead of being sold to traffickers who have decimated the country's population of turtles and other species to cater to demand for exotic wildlife in China.

The southern river terrapin, once considered the sole property of Cambodia's kings, only survives in the wilds of Malaysia, Indonesia and Cambodia, the group said in a statement. The population in the Sre Ambel river is estimated at less than 10 nesting females.

But it said the terrapins there have an excellent chance of recovery because coastal mangrove forests in the region are among the largest and most pristine in Southeast Asia, spanning some 175 square miles (45,000 hectares).

The first-ever satellite monitoring of the species hopes to determine how the turtle will fare among fisherman as well as in areas threatened by sand mining and conversion of mangrove forests into shrimp farms.

A small population of the species was found in 2000 in Sre Ambel after being considered locally extinct for many years.

Following the brutal rule of the Khmer Rouge in the mid-1970s which left the country devastated, poor rural dwellers scoured the forests for wildlife, much of which was sold to traders connected to China, where many wild animals - from turtles to tigers - are believed to possess medicinal and sex-enhancing properties.

The turtle project is being run by the Wildlife Conservation Society in cooperation with the Cambodian government and Wildlife Reserves

Singapore, a zoological enterprise.

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