

## Thais free 1,066 turtles to celebrate King's birthday

July 26 2017

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Many Thai Buddhists view freeing [captive animals](#) such as turtles or birds as a way to accrue good karma.

"Sea turtles are long-living animals. If we release them, it will help His Majesty to have a long life too," said Eagarat Promlumpug, an officer who helps run the navy's turtle conservation programme.

The number of freed [turtles](#) is seen as auspicious, with the '66'—one more year than the king's age—representing the wish for his longevity.

The centre collects thousands of [turtle eggs](#) annually and nurtures the reptiles before releasing them into the Gulf of Thailand.

Royal birthdays are met with a flurry of fanfare and religious ceremonies in Thailand, where the monarchy is seen a pillar of moral authority.

Vajiralongkorn's birthday, July 28, was declared a public holiday by the ruling junta after he took the throne late last year.

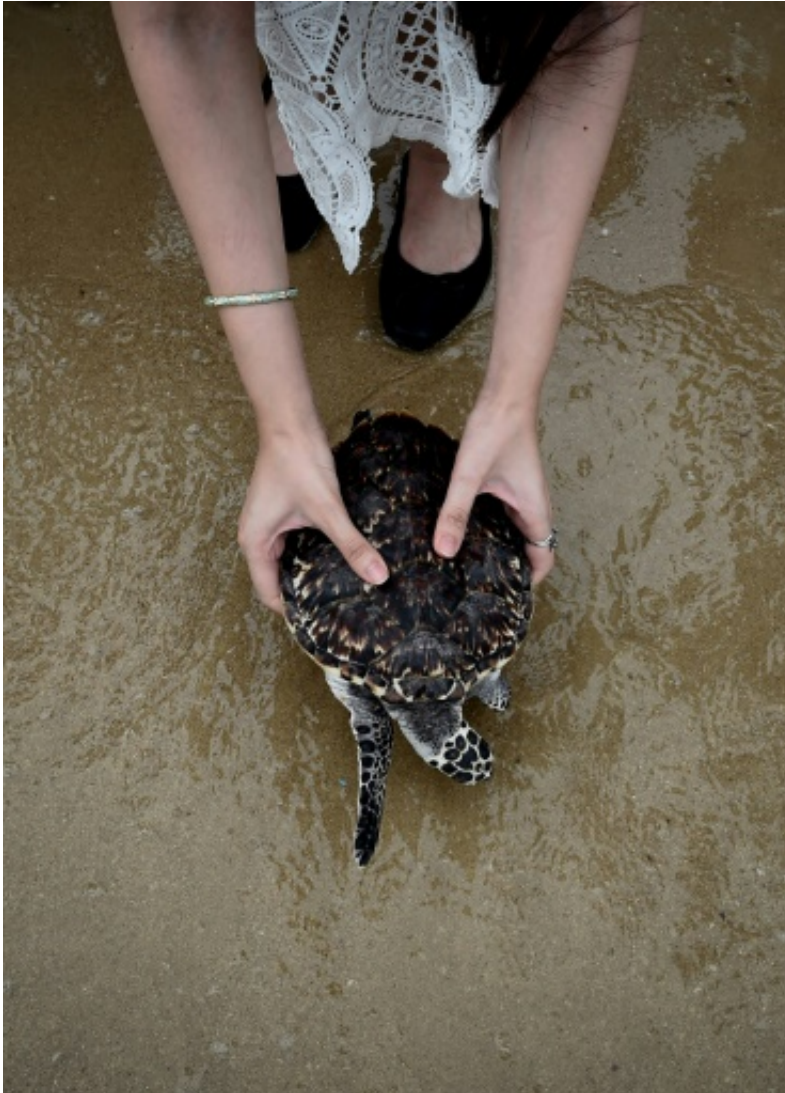
His father Bhumibol Adulyadej, who passed away in October 2016, was worshipped as a near demi-god during his 70-year reign.



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Vajiralongkorn has yet to attract that level of devotion.

All royal family members are shielded from criticism by a draconian defamation law that has landed offenders decades in jail and forces all media in Thailand to self-censor.



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A man nudges a sea turtle into the Gulf of Thailand during the annual turtle conservation release event at the Royal Thai Navy Sea Turtle Conservation Centre

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