

# Crawling to extinction: Singapore turtle haven fights for life

April 29 2019, by Theodore Lim

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face an uncertain future after their Singapore sanctuary—a Guinness World Record holder—was forced to relocate due to government redevelopment plans.

At its peak around 1,000 of the creatures were housed at The Live Turtle and Tortoise Museum, which opened in 2001 at popular tourist spot Chinese Gardens. It also showcased specimens and memorabilia such as figurines and stuffed toys.

While the venture built up a loyal following, there had been criticism online of the conditions the reptiles were kept in. Authorities decided to repurpose the area, and evicted them— leaving owner Connie Tan scrambling to find and finance a new location.

"I gave up quite a lot for this, and it's tough. My son's university education fees have gone into keeping this place alive," explains Tan, whose father created the original [museum](#), securing the Guinness World Record for the "largest collection of [tortoise](#) and turtle items".

She spent Sg\$250,000 (\$185,000) on the new venue but was only able to secure a short two-year lease and conceded the venture is running low on funds—a situation that has raised concerns about the long-term future for the [turtles](#) and tortoises.

Tan has battled hard to keep the museum going, even seeking out help from Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on [social media](#) when she needed more time to find a suitable location.



Singapore's Live Turtle and Tortoise Museum owner Connie Tan battled hard to keep the sanctuary going after the original location was closed down due to government redevelopment plans

### **Endangered species**

During the move, she closed her event management business to house the turtles and tortoises at her office, leaving her temporarily without an income.

Today there are around 700 turtles at the new site in Yishun, a residential area far from Singapore's main leisure and tourism hotspots.

The collection of animals has been amassed by the Tan family for more

than 40 years. Many of the reptiles were pets that were rescued after the owners abandoned them.

"Tortoises may not react to you as much as how dogs can do, but they do have the ability to communicate with you if you pay attention to them. So, those people who'd like to buy turtles and tortoises, you must be ready to accept them for who they are," she explains.

Tan says there are around 50 [different species](#) including some that are facing extinction such as the Reeves' Turtle, which is used in Chinese Traditional Medicine and has been overhunted in the wild.



There are some 700 reptiles at the Live Turtle and Tortoise Museum in Singapore

It is classed as endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's "Red List of Threatened Species".

The museum also houses African spurred tortoises and Indian star tortoises—often taken from the wild for the exotic pet trade—both are classed by the IUCN as "vulnerable".

Despite the challenges, Tan hopes visitor support will ensure her project's survival.

The 48-year-old says: "Friends of the museum have been generous with their donations, and I've started receiving visitors from places as far away as Russia, Poland, and even Israel."

She adds: "It does give me hope for the future."

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