

## 206 of Cambodia's rare royal turtles released at new center

September 13 2016, by Sopheng Cheang

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In this photo released by the Wildlife Conservation Society, conservationists prepare to release Royal Turtles at a conservation centre in Mondul Seima, Koh Kong province, Cambodia, Tuesday, Sept. 13, 2016. The New York-based Wildlife Conservation Society have transferred 206 of the nearly extinct Royal Turtles to a new purpose-built breeding and conservation center, easing fears the rare species will disappear in Cambodia. (Mengey Eng/Wildlife Conservation Society via AP)

More than 200 of Cambodia's nearly extinct royal turtles were released

Tuesday in muddy waters at a new breeding and conservation center that was built in hopes of keeping the national reptile from disappearing.

The Koh Kong Reptile Conservation Center in western Cambodia is a joint effort between the government's fisheries department and the New York-based Wildlife Conservation Society.

The 206 turtles belong to one of the world's 25 most endangered tortoise and freshwater turtle species. It's also known as the southern river terrapin, but its primary name harkens to historical times when only the royal family could consume the turtle's eggs.

The turtle was believed extinct until 2000 when a small population was rediscovered, and it was designated the national reptile in 2005.

Since 2001, a joint project between the government and conservation society has saved 39 nests with a total of 564 eggs that resulted in 382 hatchlings. The hatchlings are raised in captivity and later released into the wild.

"With very few Royal Turtles left in the wild and many threats to their survival, Cambodia's national reptile is facing a high risk of extinction," said Ouk Vibol, director of Fisheries Conservation Department.

"By protecting nests and head starting the hatchlings, we are increasing the chances of survival for this important species for Cambodia," he said.



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The breeding and conservation center has five big ponds with grass and sand banks for the resettled turtles to nest, society spokesman Eng Mengey said by telephone from Koh Kong province where the center is located.

"We hope in time to have other species like Siamese crocodiles at the center, and may even develop it into a site for ecotourism to generate revenue to be used for conserving the [turtles](#) in the center," Ross Sinclair, the society's country director for Cambodia, said in the statement.



In this photo released by the Wildlife Conservation Society, boxes containing Royal Turtles are prepared for release at a conservation center in Mondul Seima, Koh Kong province, Cambodia, Tuesday, Sept. 13, 2016. The New York-based Wildlife Conservation Society have transferred 206 of the nearly extinct Royal Turtles to a new purpose-built breeding and conservation center, easing fears the rare species will disappear in Cambodia. (Mengey Eng/Wildlife Conservation Society via AP)

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