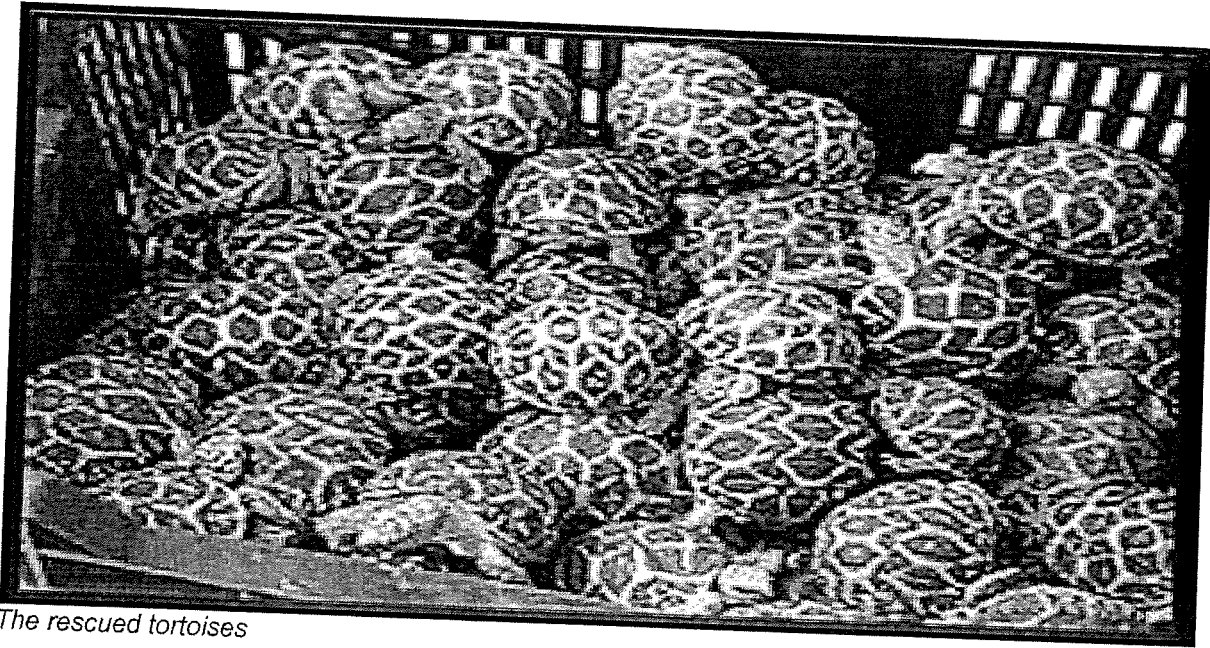


# The Times of India

## 470 rescued star tortoises brought to Vandalur zoo

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*The rescued tortoises*

CHENNAI: Four hundred and sixty plus star tortoises (*Geochelone elegans*) along with the Indian roof turtles (*Pangshura tecta*) that were rescued by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) officials in Madurai about 10 days ago, found a new home in Vandalur zoo on Wednesday. Zoo director in-charge Shekhar Kumar Niraj told the TOI that a total of 468 star tortoises and 11 Indian roof turtles were rescued by the DRI officials from Madurai and Pudukottai districts while they were being taken to Sri Lanka.

The star tortoises were collected from the wild in Cuddappah district of Andhra Pradesh and from a few coastal districts of Tamil Nadu. The Indian roof turtle is found along the major rivers such as Ganga and Brahmaputra in north India and Assam. Both the species are in demand in the pet trade.

A DRI officer said soon after the tortoise consignment was intercepted, it was handed over to forest officials in Madurai. However, as the turtles need a suitable fresh water habitat, it was decided by forest officials to send them to Vandalur zoo for rehabilitation.

All the rescued reptiles have reached safely the zoo, Niraj said. "There was no casualty while transporting them to the zoo. Generally, soon after the seizure a few reptiles used to die due to suffocation, as they are stuffed in suitcases with no scope for ventilation. Some of them die after seizure due to stress triggered by cramped packing. But, this time the officials took extra care to safely transport them to the zoo. This is the second such successful transportation with no mortality of seized reptiles," he said.

Forest officials in the state say this is the first ever seizure of Indian roof turtles that are collected from the Brahmaputra river in Assam being smuggled to the south. Zoo officials too said they were rehabilitating a new species of turtle from the eastern parts of the country.

Samples for DNA analysis will be collected from the reptiles and bio-metric profile of them will be gathered. The collected samples will be sent to Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) Hyderabad. This is being done to trace the place of origin or the habitat from where these reptiles were collected. Once that is found out, then releasing them back in their original habitat will be easy, said a senior officer.