

Rescue, Recovery and Captive Management of Illegally Smuggled Indian Star Tortoises

D. Ewing

Animal Care Department, Crystal Garden Conservation Centre, 713 Douglas Street,
Victoria, BC, Canada V8W 2B4, < dlewing@shaw.ca >, Ph: (H) 250- 920-0412/ (W) 250-953-8813

The Indian Star Tortoise (*Geochelone elegans*) is native to the subcontinent of India and Pakistan. The Indian Star Tortoise is on the endangered species list of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Environment Canada regulates the International and inter-provincial trade of endangered species so that the species have the protection needed to ensure a better chance of survival. The Indian Star Tortoise is becoming rare and may soon become extinct due to threats of habitat loss, illegal pet trade and sold as food in Asian markets.

In 1996, Crystal Garden Conservation Centre along with seven other accredited zoos received amongst them 105 baby Indian Star Tortoises. The tortoises were seized by Customs Canada and Environment Canada when they were smuggled into Canada for the pet trade. The tortoises had a slow recovery due to stress of travelling from India to Canada in egg carton containers without food or water. Many of the tortoises also had upper respiratory infections. The Crystal Garden Conservation Centre animal care department provided inventive strategies in captive management and tireless care in providing the tortoises with long-term survival. The health and growth patterns of the tortoises are still studied and monitored continuously. The star tortoises are an ongoing part of the education program at Crystal Garden Conservation Centre in teaching public awareness about threats to the tortoise. When mature the Indian Star Tortoises will be part of a breeding program.