

Turtles seized near Patna in Bihar

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The Railway Protection Special Force (RPSF) deployed at Danapur railway station near Patna seized over 150 live turtles packed in gunny bags, from West Bengal bound 3484 DN Farakka Express on 3rd June 2008. However, kingpin of the gang accompanying the consignment, managed to escape, the carrier was arrested by the force. Reportedly, the turtles were on the way to Malda town in West Bengal after being captured from Sultanpur district in Uttar Pradesh (UP). Plastron and legs of many turtles were pierced to tie them up together.

It is worth mentioning that as many as 45 turtles were seized from the same train at the same railway station on 20th May 2008. During the same month, five smugglers were arrested in Lucknow, the state capital of UP, with 58 turtles captured from the Gomati River in the state. These events reflect the frequency of turtles being smuggled from UP to West Bengal via this route. Reports say that most of the smuggled turtles ultimately reach Bangladesh, where it is relished as food and considered having medicinal properties.

Few years back, turtles were smuggled mainly through Grand Trunk road leading to West Bengal after crossing UP and Bihar. In 2002, turtles were seized near Barachatti on this road in Gaya district in Bihar. In December 2006 about 5000 turtles were

seized and two persons were arrested with a vehicle on the same road near Aurangabad town in Bihar. In the last four months of 2006, turtles were seized thrice in the region.

The Indian soft shelled turtle (*Aspideretes gangeticus*) and Indian flap shell turtle (*Lissemys punctata*) are two important freshwater turtle species under trade through this route. The soft shell turtles are the most sought after species for food due to the fact that their meat is soft and palatable. As per estimates, in India 50 million people rely on turtles as a source of food. Shells and blood are also in demand for medicinal purposes. Both the species are protected under Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 of India.

The freshwater turtles in India are facing severe threats not only due to illegal trade but also due to habitat destruction. Intensive cultivation up to water line in the riparian zone of the rivers destroys the nesting ground of this reptilian fauna. The turtles play a crucial role in maintaining the ecology and cleanliness of water bodies.

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Announcements

10th International Congress of the Mammological Society

The 10th International Congress of Mammalogy (IMC-10) will be held in Mendoza, Argentina, 9-14 August, 2009. Students and professionals in the field of mammalian biology are encouraged to attend. It will be a forum for the stimulating exchange of ideas and promotion of integrative and collaborative research among the members of the mammalian biology scientific community.

Zoos and Aquariums Committing to Conservation January 23-26, 2009 Houston, Texas

The Houston Zoo will host the next bi-annual Zoos and Aquariums Committing to Conservation (ZACC) Conference in January 2009. If you are interested in submitting a presentation for consideration, please include a brief biological sketch in addition to your abstract and send it to conservation@houstonzoo.org. Abstracts will be received and reviewed from May 15th through June 15, 2008. Notification of acceptance will be made by June 30, 2008.

Cheetah Conservation Fund International Training Courses

The Cheetah Conservation Fund will be holding International Training Courses on Cheetah Conservation Biology and Integrated Livestock and Predator Management in Namibia.

New Species Staff

Helen Boulden is the new Junior Professional Associate, Species Programme. Helen holds a Master's degree in Ecology and the Environment from Lancaster University, UK with areas of study and work experience including conservation biology, Species and habitat management. Helen's time at IUCN will be dedicated to communications support including assisting in the preparation of the 2008 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species update and general support to the Species Programme and SSC network. helen.boulden@iucn.org