

[Endangered Turtles Rescued](#)

International environmental groups have begun transporting hundreds of endangered turtles to a wildlife protection center in the American state of Florida.

The turtles were part of an illegal shipment of more than seven-thousand freshwater turtles being sent to Chinese markets. Wildlife officials in Hong Kong rescued the turtles last month from illegal traders in Southeast Asia.

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The rescue effort is part of a plan to save freshwater turtles from disappearing. Among the turtles are some of the world's most endangered species. They include the Asian Brown turtle, the black marsh turtle, the box turtle and the painted terrapin. More than half of all Asian freshwater turtle species are endangered. The Yunnan box turtle has already disappeared.

Turtles have survived on earth for more than two-hundred-million years. However, some of the best known soft-shell species are endangered because of a growing market for them in China in recent years. The meat of soft-shell turtles is especially popular among wealthy Chinese. Turtle shells are traded to supply the traditional Chinese medicine industry. Many Chinese believe turtle shells can increase sexual powers.

Many countries in Southeast and East Asia have passed legislation providing some protection for turtles. But those laws are not strongly enforced. Recently, officials in Hong Kong have begun to do more to stop the illegal trade in turtles. Hong Kong is a port of entry to the mainland Chinese market.

Wildlife officials in Hong Kong say that the seven-thousand turtles seized in the raid last month were worth more than three-million dollars. The turtles were crowded into small boxes. Many of the turtles suffered from the cold, lack of water and disease. About five-hundred of them died shortly after they were discovered.

Conservation International and other environmental groups are leading efforts to save the turtles. They asked an American airline company to transport hundreds of the turtles from Hong Kong to a rescue center in Miami, Florida. The turtles will be treated and recorded by species and sex. Then they will be placed in zoos and other nature centers. In time, the turtles will be returned to their natural homes in Southeast and East Asia.

This VOA Special English ENVIRONMENT REPORT was written by Cynthia Kirk. January 10, 2002.