

70 RARE ASSAM TEMPLE TURTLE HATCHLINGS RELEASED IN 'MINI KAZIRANGA'

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Biodiversity, Ecology, and Wildlife Related Issues

Black Softshell turtle being released in Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary near Guwahati on September 2, 2019. | Photo Credit: [Special Arrangement](#)

About 70 hatchlings of the rare Black Softshell and Indian Softshell turtles bred in the ponds of two temples in Assam were on Monday released in the Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary, about 50 km east of Guwahati.

The sanctuary is often called 'Mini Kaziranga' because of similar landscape and a sizeable population of the one-horned rhino.

The "wild restocking" of the two turtle species was done under a joint programme of the management committees of two temples — Ugratara in Guwahati and Hayagriv Madhav in Hajo about 35 km north-west — the Assam Forest Department and two NGOs specialising in the conservation of reptiles.

These organisations are Turtle Survival Alliance and Help Earth.

"This wild restocking programme is important for sustaining turtles in the Brahmaputra river system, especially the Black Softshell (*Nilssonia nigricans*) that is considered extinct in the wild. Thankfully, the last of these rare species were surviving in some of Assam's temple ponds that are not ideal habitats for them," Help Earth's Jayaditya Purkayastha told *The Hindu*.

"One has to appreciate the Dolois (chief priests) of Ugratara and Hayagriv Madhab temples for backing the conservation programme and Pranab Malakar, the caretaker of the turtles at the temples besides the Forest Department's role in the captive breeding," he added.

The hatchlings from the temple ponds were nurtured at a conservation facility at the Assam State Zoo in Guwahati.

Assam is the most species-rich State in India in terms of turtle diversity. It is home to 20 species of freshwater turtles and tortoises out of 29 species found in India. But, 80% of these species are threatened with extinction.

Help Earth had last year organised the release of 35 captive-bred turtle hatchlings in the Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary.

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