



African softshell turtle *Trionyx triunguis*, caught in the Gambia River near the village of Soucoutha, Senegal. Photo: Pearson McGovern.

weeks searching for this species along the Gambia River (c. 150 km between Gouloumbou and Tako Mayo) in south-east Senegal. My interviews with fishers, and trapping, suggest the turtle is rare, with interviewees stating they see an individual approximately every 5 years. Together with 35 fishers in nearly 30 villages, I only managed to capture one live individual (in January 2022) and I located two carapaces (in August 2021) of individuals consumed in a remote village.

After measuring, marking, and conserving a tissue sample from the live individual, it was released where it was caught near the village of Soucoutha. These three records were, however, sufficient to double the known records for this species in Senegal, highlighting the historical absence of surveys for this species in the country. All three individuals (two juveniles and one adult) were caught within 10 km of each other along the south-west border of Niokolo-Koba National Park, potentially the last remaining area in which this species occurs in Senegal. Although there are no previous survey data for this species in this area, fishers suggested there have been significant declines over the previous 2–3 decades, with older fishers recounting more frequent opportunistic captures of this softshell turtle on their fishing longlines in the past.

During my surveys I provided training on the measuring and marking of turtles—five species occur in this area—for fishers in the villages bordering this area of the National Park, and they were open to ensuring a future for this locally imperilled species. Continued monitoring and a long-term partnership with the fishing communities are needed if the African softshell turtle is to survive in Senegal.

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A historic event marks World Rhino Day 2021 in India

World Rhino Day is observed every year on 22 September to create awareness about the five rhinoceros species and the threats to their existence. The completion of a decade since the day was first observed in 2011 was marked by a historic event on 22 September 2021 in the state of Assam, India, with 2,479 horns of the greater one-horned rhinoceros *Rhinoceros unicornis*, weighing a total of 1,300 kg, destroyed in gas furnaces in Bokakhat. The aim was to send a clear message against rhinoceros poaching, as this species is extensively poached for the presumed medicinal properties of its horn. Some people also consider possession of rhinoceros horn to be a symbol of social status.

The one-horned rhinoceros is the state animal of Assam and is an integral part of its cultural heritage. The state is home to 71% of the global population of the species and the decision to publicly burn the horns was unanimously taken by its cabinet on 16 September 2021. The national Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, forbids the trade of rhinoceros horns in India, and international trade in the horn is prohibited by CITES. The state government of Assam was against adding value to illegal trade by selling the horns. The destroyed horns were part of a stockpile of 2,623 horns seized by authorities or recovered from dead individuals since 1979.

The horns were subjected to a process of verification and reconciliation in which every horn was matched with official records, photographed and assigned a unique identification number. This was followed by a detailed DNA analysis of samples from the stock. Verification and reconciliation were carried out during August–September 2021 and involved the forest administration as well as wildlife and forensic experts. Examination of the horns revealed that 21 were imitations and 15 were from the African rhinoceros *Diceros bicornis*. Based on the outcome of DNA analysis and examination of physical characteristics, 94 horns with unique characteristics were preserved for research and academic purposes. This included the second-longest horn in the world, measuring 51.5 cm in length and weighing 2.5 kg, as well as the heaviest rhinoceros horn in the world, measuring 36 cm in length and weighing 3.05 kg. In addition, 50 horns related to pending legal cases were not burnt.

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