

Dear

**The Tortoise Project with FreeMe Wildlife**

Did you know:

- South Africa has the largest species diversity of land tortoise found anywhere in the world: home to 14 of the world's 54 tortoise species.
- Tortoises are the longest living of all reptile species, living to between 80 and 150 years of age. South Africa's Leopard Tortoise can live up to 100 years of age in the wild (but only 30-75 years in captivity).
- The South African endemic Geometric Tortoise is considered an endangered species.
- All South African tortoises are listed by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) prohibiting or rigorously controlling the trade of these species. As such, wild tortoises may not be removed from the wild or kept as pets.

Yet every year an unknown number of tortoises are picked up off the side of the road and taken home or sold as pets. Annually, HUNDREDS of such tortoises are handed in to wildlife rehabilitation centres and zoos by members of the public who find escaped or abandoned pets wandering through neighbourhoods. However, due to the fact that no formal tortoise rehabilitation and re-wilding programme exists in South Africa, almost NONE OF THESE TORTOISES ARE EVER RETURNED TO THE WILD. Consequently, there are hundreds of tortoises being held in captivity in South Africa today with no current prospect of ever being returned to the wild.

In order to address this problem, A Rocha SA has entered into a partnership with **FreeMe Wildlife** (KZN) to set up and operate a tortoise rehabilitation and re-wilding programme for KwaZulu-Natal. This pioneering rehabilitation programme will put into practice rehabilitation protocols that have been approved by the relevant conservation authorities and will be tested and fine-tuned, but to start with we need to construct the rehabilitation enclosures. Ultimately a complex of 10 individual enclosures (holding 100 tortoises in total) will be constructed in three phases as finance becomes available. As tortoises are surprisingly good at staging escapes by digging under, climbing over or simply pushing through things, these enclosures have to be very sturdy concrete constructions. We need your help in funding these enclosures either through your personal contribution or corporate donations. This also provides churches, home groups and Sunday schools a direct opportunity to contribute to a creation care project. Perhaps you have a unique fundraising idea or event that you would like to run to raise funds for The Tortoise Project: we would love to hear from you.

And mostly, we would value your prayers for this project and those involved, that God would grant us success in our endeavour to care for His creation, just as He has commanded us to.

For more information on The Tortoise Project contact [info@arocha.org.za](mailto:info@arocha.org.za).

Stay tuned for possible tortoise rehabilitation work in other provinces of South Africa. This truly is a pioneering project and one of a kind globally.

FreeMe Wildlife (KZN) situated in Howick is amongst the top wildlife rehabilitation centres in South Africa and A Rocha SA is very excited to be collaborating with them for the conservation of tortoises. FreeMe KZN will bring their considerable experience in animal health and rehabilitation whilst A Rocha SA will construct the tortoise-proof rehabilitation enclosures and establish a 'tortoise garden' consisting of food plants the animals would likely encounter in their natural habitat. As weaning captive held tortoises of a diet of kitchen vegetables and habituating them to food plants natural to their areas of intended release is absolutely vital to the long term survival of the tortoise in the wild, A Rocha SA's work is critical to the success of the project.

Can you play a part of this pioneering project? Most definitely!

Donate directly with the reference 'tortoise'

A Rocha SA

Nedbank Universal branch code: 198765

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<https://www.arocha.org.za/financial-contributions/>



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God's people caring for God's creation

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