

BGCI committed to mentoring and supporting the network's development, with an emphasis on resource mobilization once the working practices of the network are established. Members of the national network were encouraged to join BGCI's membership and accreditation schemes, to become part of the global botanic garden community. Future opportunities for the network include developing accredited courses, joint publications, staff exchange, sharing successful conservation and education approaches, and influencing policy through shared knowledge. The participants also highlighted other potential areas for collective engagement, emphasizing interactions with diverse stakeholders, the role of gardens in promoting understanding of native species and ecological habitats, and participation in ecological restoration initiatives. In the first instance, the network secretariat will be based at Auroville Botanical Gardens.

The inception of the Indian Botanical Gardens Network marks an important step towards collaboration, a cornerstone in the sustainable conservation of India's diverse plant life.

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Rewilding of black softshell turtles in Brahmaputra landscape, India

Turtle Survival Alliance Foundation India and Assam Forest Department, with financial support from the Disney Conservation Fund and Turtle Survival Alliance, rewilded hatchlings of the Critically Endangered black softshell turtle *Nilssonina nigricans* in the Brahmaputra River within Kaziranga Tiger Reserve, Assam, from late November 2023 to mid January 2024. The hatchlings were approximately 5 months old. They were head-started from 368 eggs sourced from 27 nests protected at Nagshankar temple, Biswanath district, Assam.

The black softshell turtle is threatened by overexploitation and fisheries bycatch. Endemic to Brahmaputra basin, the species was thought to be extinct in the wild and confined to Bostami shrine in Bangladesh until recent sightings in the Brahmaputra River drainage and records from a few temple ponds in north-east and east India.

Assam's temple ponds are known to hold a number of threatened turtle species. The ponds have recently gained prominence as semi-captive conservation facilities, and the Turtle Survival Alliance Foundation India project team has

been helping two temple ponds with husbandry improvements, nest protection and rear and release programmes since 2018. Artificial incubation of the eggs of the black softshell turtle at optimum temperature and humidity conditions resulted in 64% hatching success in 2023. The newly emerged hatchlings were fed live fish fingerlings, maintained in a heated indoor environment and regularly moved into the sun for basking.

Pre-release habitat suitability surveys were conducted at eight potential sites in the Brahmaputra floodplains. Two sites were chosen that would allow released turtles to acclimatize over the winter before dispersing into the mainstream as the river floods during the monsoon. After primary health screening, a total of 150 black softshell turtle hatchlings were released on three occasions in the two locations. Approximately 35 hatchlings from 2023 have been retained in the semi-captive facility until they weigh 1 kg, to allow them to be fitted with acoustic telemetry devices prior to release. This will allow us to investigate their survival and dispersal after release.

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Rediscovery of the Critically Endangered *Plantago fengdouensis* in Sichuan, China

In April 2023, a group of *Plantago* plants with unusual leaf morphology was found on a cobblestone beach at 245–255 m altitude on an island in the Yangtze River in Jiang'an County, Yibin City, Sichuan Province. The species was identified as *Plantago fengdouensis* (Z.E. Chao & Yong Wang) Yong Wang & Z. Yu Li (Plantaginaceae), a National Class II Protected and Critically Endangered plant in China. This was the first record of *P. fengdouensis* in Sichuan.

Plantago fengdouensis is endemic to the Yangtze River Basin and was originally known only from three islands in the Yangtze River. In 2001, before the impoundment of the river to form the Three Gorges Reservoir, Wang Yong and Wu Jinqing of Wuhan Institute of Botany, Chinese Academy of Sciences, first discovered the species on the island of Fengwei Dam in the Yangtze River, Fengdu County, Chongqing, which is below the inundation line of the reservoir. In 2004, the type specimen was collected in Chongqing and preserved in the herbarium of Wuhan Botanical Garden (holotype HIB 0151258), and the species was named. But by 2006, there were less than 30 of the original 290 plants remaining. After the completion of the Three Gorges Dam Project in 2009, the wild habitat of the species was submerged, and the species was declared extinct in the wild. *Plantago fengdouensis*