

CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES  
OF WILD FAUNA AND FLORA



Seventeenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties  
Johannesburg (South Africa), 24 September – 5 October 2016

JOINT STATEMENT REGARDING MADAGASCAR'S PLOUGHSHARE / ANGONOKA TORTOISE

1. This document has been submitted by the United States of America at the request of the Wildlife Conservation Society, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, Turtle Survival Alliance, and The Turtle Conservancy, in relation to agenda item 73 on *Tortoises and freshwater turtles (Testudines spp.)*\*.
2. This species is restricted to a limited range in northwestern Madagascar. It has been included in CITES Appendix I since 1975 and has been categorized as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species since 2008. There has been a significant increase in the level of illegal collection and trafficking of this species to supply the high end pet trade over the last 5 years.
3. Attached please find the joint statement regarding Madagascar's Ploughshare/Angonoka Tortoise, which is considered directly relevant to Document CoP17 Doc. 73 on tortoises and freshwater turtles.

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\* The geographical designations employed in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the CITES Secretariat (or the United Nations Environment Programme) concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or area, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The responsibility for the contents of the document rests exclusively with its author.



**CITES CoP 17 - 24 September – 5 October, 2016**  
**Statement on Ploughshare Tortoise (*Astrochelys yniphora*), Madagascar**

The endemic Ploughshare tortoise, *Astrochelys yniphora* (known in Malagasy as 'angonoka'), included in CITES Appendix I since 1975, is in crisis. This emblematic species is Madagascar's largest tortoise, and occurs only in the Baly Bay National Park in northwestern Madagascar, a park that was specifically established in 1997 to protect this species in its habitat. Previously largely secure from exploitation and trade (though warning was issued in Notification 2004/044), over the last five years there has been a significant increase in the level of collection and trafficking of this species to supply individuals to unscrupulous tortoise hobbyists and collectors.

Document CoP17 Doc 73 (page 62) shows that during the period up to mid-2015, a total of 18 seizure cases, involving 146 live ploughshare tortoises, were reported; the number of animals that escaped detection is unknown, but based on animals offered for sale in markets and on the internet it is likely that the number trafficked greatly exceeds the number of seized animals. Over the last 12 months, the problem has accelerated to reach new levels, and since early 2016 whole areas of the Baly Bay NP appear to have been totally emptied of animals by highly organised and now visible networks of traffickers.

It is estimated that there are currently less than **one hundred adults** left in the wild in Baly Bay NP. **This species will be extinct in the wild in the short-term future, possibly in the next 2 – 3 years**, if current poaching pressure continues. We are bearing witness to the extinction in the wild of the country's largest endemic reptile and its most massive endemic terrestrial vertebrate in modern times, an unprecedented biodiversity emergency in Madagascar.

To stop the trafficking and eventually re-establish and recover the tortoise population in Baly Bay NP, a multi-faceted approach is needed. This approach, if implemented in a rigorous manner, will have significant benefits for all species in Madagascar threatened by trafficking. We therefore:

1. Encourage the Government of Madagascar to actively and resolutely pursue all observed infractions regarding poaching or trafficking of *A. yniphora*.
2. Encourage the Government of Madagascar, in collaboration with national and international partners, to commit the required technical and financial resources to ensure adequate enforcement in the National Park (e.g. permanent law enforcement officers in the National Park, professional security training for Park rangers and village patrols, and use of tracker dogs).
3. Encourage the Government of Madagascar to work with international partners to establish a national Wildlife Crime Unit to deal with crimes related to *A. yniphora* and other wildlife under threat in Madagascar.
4. Encourage the Government of Madagascar to work with international partners to build institutional and technical capacity of customs and other services at Ivato International Airport, including the coordination between the numerous Government partners responsible for security and enforcement at the airport.
5. Encourage the Government of Madagascar to engage in dialogue with the responsible authorities of the countries where illegally exported ploughshare tortoises are offered for sale, to find effective ways to act against trafficking and unlawful possession.
6. Encourage the CITES Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles Task Force established under Decision 16.119 (or its successor) to prioritise consideration of trafficking of Madagascar's endemic tortoises and work with the Government of Madagascar to develop effective and long-term solutions to the current crisis.

On the occasion of the 17<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to CITES, we urge the Parties, working closely with relevant NGOs and IGOs, to take immediate action regarding the trafficking in specimens of *A. yniphora* to avoid the real risk of imminent loss of a significant element of Madagascar's natural heritage.

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