

Madagascan tortoise on verge of extinction

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Johannesburg - Unless the government of Madagascar takes swift action to enforce international anti-poaching and anti-trafficking laws, the country's largest tortoise – the ploughshare tortoise (or angonoka tortoise) – will likely go extinct in the wild within the next two years, warns a coalition of NGOs working on tortoise conservation.

The coalition issued their warning on Monday at the CITES conference in an attempt to bring the world's attention to the desperate plight of the rare tortoise. They say the fate of this tortoise is in the hands of the government of Madagascar.



The South African Environmental Affairs stand is seen at the CoP17 exhibition at the Sandton Convention Centre. Picture: Kim Ludbrook. Credit: EPA

“This is a wildlife emergency – the ploughshare tortoise is on the verge of extinction, driven by criminal networks and unscrupulous collectors who will pay top dollar the rarer a species is,” said Susan Lieberman, vice president for international policy from the Wildlife

Conservation Society on Monday.

“The CITES Parties must take urgent, immediate action to prevent this amazing species and part of Madagascar’s unique natural heritage from disappearing forever,” said Lieberman. Ploughshare tortoises live only in the Baly Bay National Park in north-western Madagascar, a park established in 1997 specifically to protect the species in its natural habitat.

Poachers target the animal to export to international collectors as a highly coveted pet with its striking gold and black shell.

Conservationists estimate there may be less than 100 mature adults left in the reserve.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources Red List of Threatened Species classifies the tortoise as critically endangered.