

# Conservation News

## First record of the Indian star tortoise *Geochelone elegans* in Nepal

Recently, two subspecies of Indian star tortoise *Geochelone elegans* have been recognized: the southern Indian star tortoise *Geochelone elegans elegans* and the north-western Indian star tortoise *Geochelone elegans actinodes*. *Geochelone elegans* is categorized as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List and is in CITES Appendix I because of intense harvesting for the pet trade. The north-western Indian star tortoise is widely distributed in north-western India, including Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan and with a single record from Uttar Pradesh, and in Pakistan. Despite its broad distribution in the western part of the Indian sub-continent, there has previously been no verified record of the species in Nepal.



On 19 August 2025, author BRS and local residents reported seeing a tortoise with characteristic star-like carapace patterns in the Kailasheswor Community Forest, in Ward Number 6 of Janaki Rural Municipality, Kailali District, Nepal. The tortoise weighed c. 3 kg and the photograph indicated diagnostic features of *G. elegans actinodes*. It was released back into the forest with the assistance of the Dolphin Conservation Center in Bhajani, Kailali, and the Division Forest Office, Kailali. Community members reported multiple sightings in previous years, suggesting the species occurs naturally in this region. This record represents a northward extension of the known range of *G. elegans actinodes*, and highlights the need for targeted surveys to determine its distribution and population status in Nepal.

Given the high risk of illegal collection and trade, any newly confirmed populations require urgent conservation attention. The Nepal–India border is a major route in the international wildlife trade, and tortoises are among the species most frequently seized. Protecting any population close to the border with India will therefore require both habitat management and enforcement against collection



Indian star tortoise *Geochelone elegans* from the Kailasheswor Community Forest, Janaki Rural Municipality, Kailali District, Nepal. Photo: Bijay Raj Shrestha.

and trafficking. Further ecological surveys and genetic analyses will be essential to confirm whether any Nepalese population is native, connected to nearby Indian populations, or the result of introductions. Regardless, the species' presence in western Nepal adds to the country's herpetofaunal diversity and warrants immediate conservation attention.

ASMIT SUBBA<sup>1</sup> , BIJAY RAJ SHRESTHA<sup>2</sup>, LAXMI PRASAD UPADHAYAYA<sup>3</sup>, DHIRENDRA BAHADUR CHAND<sup>3</sup> and LAXMAN KHANAL<sup>1</sup>  ([laxman.khanal@cdz.tu.edu.np](mailto:laxman.khanal@cdz.tu.edu.np))

<sup>1</sup>Central Department of Zoology, Institute of Science and Technology, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal.

<sup>2</sup>Dolphin Conservation Center, Kailali, Nepal.

<sup>3</sup>Conservation Himalaya, Kathmandu, Nepal

This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).