New home for Critically Endangered turtles at ZSL London Zoo

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ZSL London Zoo's new exhibit highlights survival threats to Annam leaf turtle

Zookeepers at ZSL London Zoo have embraced their artistic sides and designed a brand new exhibit for Critically Endangered Annam leaf turtles that is worthy of any Hollywood film set.

Designed to replicate a restaurant kitchen, with the turtle pool resembling a kitchen sink, a 'bubbling' soup pot and woks hanging on the wall, the inventive set-design actually paints a very sombre picture.

Originating from Vietnam, Annam leaf turtles are considered a tasty delicacy, and due to severe over-hunting for the restaurant trade and habitat loss, the species is now classified as Critically Endangered by the IUCN and facing the real threat of extinction.

Reaching up to 30cm in length, these turtles have striking looking striped necks and faces. The beautiful creatures stand out in their kitchen-themed enclosure and keepers hope the glaring juxtaposition will hit a chord with zoo visitors.

Team leader of the Reptile House at ZSL London Zoo, Ben Tapley said: "We've gone to town on the new Annam leaf turtle exhibit here at ZSL London Zoo, as we want our visitors to really understand the threats facing these animals.

"Providing a great habitat for these beautiful turtles, with water for them to swim in and a secluded nesting area hidden behind a carefully positioned wok, the creative exhibit tells a serious story.

"It has been estimated that more than ten million turtles are being traded for food, traditional medicine and the pet trade each year in Asia. Breeding programmes and zoo populations like ours here at ZSL London Zoo, are becoming increasingly important in guaranteeing the existence of these animals for the future."

Visitors to ZSL London Zoo can see the Annam leaf turtles and hundreds of other amphibian and reptile species in the Reptile House, and learn more about ZSL's charitable work to protect endangered species around the world. Book online now at www.zsl.org

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Annam leaf turtle (*Mauremys annamensis)*

The Annam leaf turtle – sometimes referred to as the Vietnamese Pond Turtle, is a freshwater turtle species originating from Vietnam. An omnivorous species, Annam leaf turtles eat fish, aquatic insects and plants, and they will feed on land and water.

Classified as Critically Endangered by the IUCN, the species is under constant threat from unsustainable hunting for the restaurant trade, and habitat loss as its home range is cleared for agricultural developments.

Annam leaf turtles are becoming an increasingly rare sight in the wild, and until very recently no individuals were spotted in Vietnam for 65 years.

The Annam leaf turtle is protected under Vietnam's wildlife protection law and is also listed under Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) which means that international trade in this species should be carefully monitored .

Zoological Society of London (ZSL)

Founded in 1826, the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) is an international scientific, conservation and educational charity whose mission is to promote and achieve the worldwide conservation of animals and their habitats. Our mission is realised through our ground-breaking science, our active conservation projects in more than 50 countries and our two Zoos, ZSL London Zoo and ZSL Whipsnade Zoo. For more information visit www.zsl.org

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