

3 Leopard Tortoises Rescued from Illegal Online Sale

What started as a concerning post on a digital marketplace ended with three lives saved and a journey back to the wild where they belong.

Free State, South Africa (03 March 2026) – Behind every online advert for a wild tortoise is a creature stolen from its natural habitat – ripped from the very environment it depends on to survive. This growing wildlife injustice is one that the [Wildlife Crime Information Network](#) tirelessly fights to curb.

Every day, the team receives reports of tortoises and other wildlife illegally removed from the wild to be kept as pets. These animals are often deprived of water, food, and freedom, or are exploited for food and traditional medicine (muti).

Most recently, the team acted on a hotline report from a concerned citizen regarding an online advert offering [three leopard tortoises for sale](#) for R1,500.00. An investigation was launched immediately.

“These sellers are often difficult to trace, hidden behind fake profiles and vague locations, but we have learned that persistence pays off. Luckily, we managed to successfully identify the seller and his address in the Free State,” the organisation shared online.

From there, all the relevant information was forwarded to the Free State Nature Conservation authorities, who responded to the identified address in Allanridge.

“Upon arrival at the property, officials located the tortoises. After an educational discussion regarding wildlife legislation and the protected status of tortoises, the individual was issued a fine of R3,000 for keeping the animals without the required permits.”

The poor animals were removed from the premises and taken to a suitable facility where they could receive the care and nourishment they urgently needed.

The Wildlife Crime Information Network hopes that this case will serve as another reminder that the illegal possession and sale of wild tortoises not only violates the law but also causes immense suffering to animals that belong in the wild – not in backyards, cages, or online marketplaces.

“We urge the public to familiarise themselves with the law and understand that all tortoises in South Africa are protected. Keeping, selling, or transporting indigenous wildlife in South Africa without the required permits is illegal and punishable by law.”

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The general public is invited to support the organisation's Every Tortoise Matters initiative, which strives to change the fate of illegally kept tortoises and safely return them to the wild, making sure they have a happy ending – “the slow walk to freedom”.

Your support can help facilitate more rescues like this and the fight against the illegal exploitation of these precious animals.

“We are grateful to everyone who has supported the Every Tortoise Matters initiative until now and who believed that the key to success lies in the dedication of all people involved in the protection of South Africa's natural assets and heritage.”

Donations can be made to the banking details below. For more information, email info@wcin.org.za. To report wildlife crime, call or WhatsApp the Hotline at 079 643 9556 or email report@wcin.org.za (all information provided will be treated as confidential).

Banking Details:

- Bank: First National Bank
- Account name: WCIN NPC
- Account no: 63109171958
- Account type: Business account
- Branch code: 250655

Sources: Wildlife Crime Information Network

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