



Baby turtles avoid the kettle, take up residence in Connecticut

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By Rob Polansky

Stamford, CT - Baby turtles likely destined for soup pots in China have been rescued and brought to a nursery in Stamford.

The 22 diamondback terrapins will be introduced by the SoundWaters Coastal Education Center Wednesday morning.

The turtles are 1 to 2 inches long and are now said to be thriving.

They are being coddled and cared for after what SoundWaters called a "near-smuggling" experience.

"This is one of those rare poaching cases with a very happy ending and the journey isn't over," said Leigh Shemitz, president of SoundWaters.



Page 2

SoundWaters said last fall, 211 baby turtles were stuffed into boots with little air or no room to move. They were confiscated from international smugglers in Alaska.

In December, they were stabilized and sent to new permanent homes at more than a dozen facilities across the country, including SoundWaters in Stamford.

Turtle soup is considered a delicacy in China, according to the rescue group. The country has a lucrative market for the reptiles.

As a result, it led to their near-extinction in the 1930s. Today, they are still considered endangered thanks to state and federal regulations.

Experts said diamondback terrapins are the only marine species of turtle native to Connecticut.

"As the population of wild turtles has been depleted in Asia, the demand for North American turtles has increased," said Gavin Shire, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Public Affairs chief. "Wildlife trafficking involves people in the U.S., as well, not just faceless, international criminals."

Shemitz said rescued terrapins cannot be released back into the wild.

"Diamondback terrapins have a lifespan of up to 40 years, so Connecticut and New York residents can follow each chapter of this success story for decades to come," she said. "Our terrapins, and our students, will grow together."

SoundWaters said it was selected because of its existing rescue program. It's also a member of the Diamondback Terrapin Working Group, which works to protect the species.

Each day, the SoundWaters staff said it takes meticulous care of the turtles. They monitor their weight, food intake and administer medications.