

## RADIATED TORTOISE SEIZURE IN MADAGASCAR – A CONSERVATION CALAMITY

On April 10<sup>th</sup> 2018 the largest confiscation ever of freshwater turtles or tortoises took place in southern Madagascar. Almost 11,000 Critically Endangered Radiated Tortoises were found in a residential house in the city of Toliara.

Neighbours reported an overwhelming stench which led to the seizure of the tortoises and arrest of the ringleaders.

The confiscated tortoises were transported to the Tortoise Village of SOPTOM (Centre for the Observation and Protection of Tortoises and their Habitat), a French-run tortoise facility in southern Madagascar in Ifaty. A concerted rescue campaign has been started, coordinated by the Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA) with many other organisations having an input.

A team of biologists and vets was put into place immediately. Mortality rates were high at first but have now subsided. One group of tortoises has been transferred to TSA facilities near Tsiombe, but a great many, well over 5000, remain at the Ifaty Village.

### BCG HELP

Our Conservation Officer has been in touch with TSA and an initial donation towards the care and maintenance of the tortoises has been offered. The TSA will let us know where and when needs are most urgent. A large sum of money has been approved by the Board to be allocated towards the aid and release programme and a first grant is on its way to give effective help in the Tortoise Village in Ifaty. The BCG has received some photographs to show the immensity of this monumental effort.



Curious local children showing the overwhelming impact of the smell.



Crates of confiscated tortoises arriving at SOPTOM's Tortoise Village in Ifaty, Madagascar.



Bernard Devaux with the Tortoise Village's Animal Carer, Jean Kala, one of the unsung heroes of the tragedy, at the site in Ifaty.

*Photos: Bernard Devaux, Thomas Muller, Franck Bonin*