



NCRW Bulletin

*Dispelling Misconceptions About the Private Keeping of the Giant Aldabra Tortoise (*Aldabrachelys gigantea*) in the United Kingdom*

In the wake of the tragic news regarding seven giant Aldabra tortoises being found in a wooded area near Exeter,¹ there has been a great deal of discussion and – as is often the case when emotions run high and media attention reaches an issue – there has also been a spread of misinformation, however well-intentioned, about the species in general as well as in speculation about these individuals.

As part of our job is education, the NCRW has decided to clear the air on some of these misconceptions, as well as provide some more information about this unique species of giant tortoise.

Fast Facts About the Giant Aldabra Tortoise

- Widely considered to be the second-largest species of tortoise in the world, after the Galápagos giant tortoise (*Chelonoidis niger*)
- Endemic to the Seychelles archipelago, off the coast of Africa in the Indian Ocean [Figure 1]
- Listed as **Vulnerable** by the IUCN Red List²
 - Primary threats to the wild population are resource depletion and competition with introduced goats³
- Has a long history of conservation dating back as far as the late 1800s, leading to them being well-maintained as a species in captivity⁴

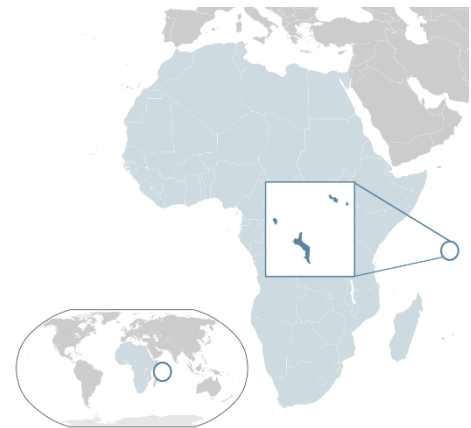


Figure 1. The location of the Seychelles archipelago

Keeping Giant Aldabra Tortoises: Not as Rare as You'd Think!

While the Aldabra tortoise has a long history of conservation, they also have a long history in private keeping worldwide! While they can be rewarding and engaging pets to the dedicated owner, these tortoises are not an easy species to keep, posing many of the same challenges as the African spurred tortoise (*Centrochelys sulcata*), only magnified by their greater size.

So, what are the facts about Giant Aldabras in the pet trade?

- They are a **CITES Appendix II** species⁵
- **NOT** legally required to have microchips
- From **2000-2023**, **4,154** Aldabra tortoises were imported **into the EU and UK**, with **608** of these imported **directly into the UK** [Figure 2]⁶
- **Over 88%** of imported tortoises are **captive bred**, with **11%** being **hatched from parents in ranching operations** designed to protect wild populations.

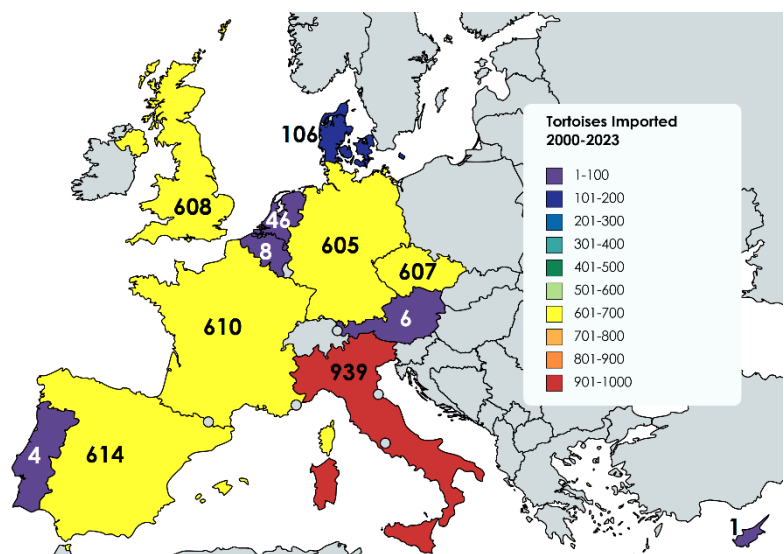


Figure 2. A map showing how many Aldabra tortoises were documented as being imported into the UK and EU countries from 2000-2023

What Does That Tell Us About *These* Tortoises?

While what has happened in Exeter is undeniably heartbreaking, the above facts do stand to clear up a few things:

- There is **nothing suspicious** about the fact that these tortoises are not microchipped – they are not legally required to be, and most owners opt against microchipping an animal if not required to do so
- Given the size of these animals, there is little doubt that these were someone's very expensive, but **completely legal** pets for a very long time
- It is **not** our policy to speculate without evidence, however, we would encourage **anyone** finding themselves in the heart-wrenching position of trying to figure out what to do when a large reptile in their care dies, to reach out to the **National Centre for Reptile Welfare** – advising on these kinds of situations without judgement is part of what we do, and we will help.

Citations

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5. UNEP (2024). "*Aldabrachys gigantea*." *The Species+ Website*. Nairobi, Kenya. Compiled by UNEP-WCMC, Cambridge, UK. Available at: speciesplus.net/species#/taxon_concepts/7291/legal
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